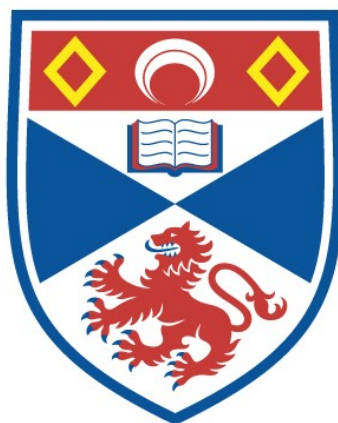


SOCIETY AND ANALOGY:  
NOTES ON THE CONTRIBUTION OF LOUIS DE BONALD TO  
POLITICAL THEOLOGY

Francois Mathieu Gael Sarah

A Thesis Submitted for the Degree of PhD  
at the  
University of St Andrews



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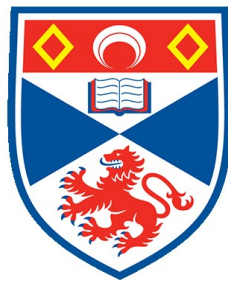
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Society and Analogy:  
Notes on the Contribution of Louis de Bonald to Political  
Theology

Francois Mathieu Gael Sarah



University of  
St Andrews

This thesis is submitted in partial fulfilment for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy (PhD)

at the University of St Andrews

June 2018

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## **General acknowledgements**

Deus Optimus Maximus

To the Memory of Professor Nicholas “Nick” Rengger (1959-2018), my primary supervisor, mentor and friend. CAPD.

To my parents, my benefactors, my supervisors and tutors at the University of St Andrews, my friends.

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## ABSTRACT

Among the counter-revolutionary figures who emerged after the French Revolution, the figure and works of Louis de Bonald (1754-1840), unlike those of Joseph de Maistre, remain shrouded in obscurity. Yet, he was in his own time recognised as the foremost critique of the excesses of the revolutionary period. His attempt at articulating a traditionalist philosophy of society and authority deserve to be better known among scholars if only because of the originality of his doctrine of the primitive revelation, which seeks to give an account of human knowledge based upon a particular understanding of human reason, and of the nature and function of language. His works also contain most invaluable insights about the ways in which societies are constituted, through a trifunctional and tripersonal understanding of the structure of social hierarchy. From his engagement on the questions of relations of the religious and the political, Louis de Bonald's works seems ideally framed for providing a fresh perspective to the study of political theology. The acknowledged indebtedness of some of the modern proponents of political theology, e.g., Carl Schmitt, is sufficient a motive for attempting a delineation of the main features of Bonald's political, social and epistemological doctrines in the light of an analogy of social forms. However, Bonald's vindication of the traditional social and customary institutions is also to be complemented by a commitment for a jusnaturalist understanding of the dignity, freedom and rights of human beings as put forward by the luminaries of the Aristotelean-Thomist school, namely Jacques Maritain and Charles Journet. The present attempt at redefining political theology, in the light of Bonald's thought, regards the social as a fundamental category of being. It is from the perspective of the permanence of society, in its immutable structure and logic of self-conservation, that man's social nature can be properly understood.

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## Prolegomena

### A. Introduction

The aim of the present study taken as a whole is to give an account of the contribution of Louis de Bonald (1754-1840) in connection with what may be broadly termed “*theologico-political themes*”, and the object of these prolegomena, in turn, is to attempt to delimitate the scope of such themes, to give an outline of a certain perspective upon the status quaestionis with regards to political theology, and to show where a more extensive engagement with the thought of Bonald could lead to an enrichment in the understanding of the field.

The continued presence, or fact, of religion, whether in the struggles of the homo religiosus against himself and the times, or in the form of the conventional institutions and engagements (churches, religious orders, schools, charities, and other comparable organisations and endowments) or in less traditional bodies and endeavours (lobbies, think-tanks, pressure groups, interest groups, identity groups, armed groups) both at the domestic and international levels, or still, in the permanence of certain symbols and ceremonies, presents a constant challenge to one of the fundamental principles of Western modernity: the separation of religion (as an organisation or a system of thought) from politics. The contemporary history of the West, and of Europe in particular, is no doubt fraught with profound continuities and discontinuities that tentatively may be characterised as being between traditions and manners retained from the old Christendom and the Ancien Régime, and the attitudes of self-assertive Modernity that arose towards the end of the Middle Ages.

It could be argued that the ways in which theologico-political themes have been addressed or the manner in which theologico-political inquiries have been prosecuted have all depended to a significant degree upon the diverse opinions and perspectives relative to these continuities and discontinuities. In other words, theologico-political thinking has reflected the particular philosophy of history that arose in the context of the political and philosophical changes that came to a crescendo in the revolutionary periods of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. In terms of the dialectic of continuities and discontinuities, the old world was begun and ended a number of times, in a temporal arc from the coronation of Charlemagne by Pope Leo III and the Treaty of Rome of 1957 (and subsequent treaties, including those of these current times), including the struggles between the Empire and the Papacy, between the national Kingdoms and the Papacy, and the Empire. It also includes the national revolutions, the wars, the loss of territories, the reconfiguration of borders, the destruction of empires, the extension of the imperial idea outside

of Europe, the creation of new nations. “*Political theology*” as a genre of political writing can only make sense from the self-conscious apprehension of the significance of the end of Western Christendom, occurring as it did not in one single event but rather in stages spread out across the centuries, and of the beginnings of a new experience that was outwardly, in the institutions and the laws, different<sup>1</sup>. In other words, the theologico-political thinking and enquiry are eminently preoccupied with the questions of history and time, with the eventuality of change and the evidence of permanence.

This last point, the evidence of permanence, is crucial in order to grasp the theological aspect of such thinking and enquiry. The permanence in question here is not so much that of the continuities between past and present forms of political thought, as the general permanence and stability of reality, of the essence of things, guaranteed by the creative and sustaining activity of a superior and supreme principle, or God. Unless one is committed to a decidedly anti-theological or meta-theological understanding of political theology, one who embarks upon theologico-political enquiry needs to address theological themes as expressing bona fide positions in terms of religious belief and philosophical conviction in terms of truth-claims. In other words, theologico-political enquiry can only be impoverished by a limited understanding of theological themes as mere repositories of symbolic content that do not express or relay genuine experiences of and beliefs about reality. Therefore, attention must be given to the ways in which practitioners of politics relate their political practice to their theological worldview. However, an understanding of theological themes in terms of human experience alone may not be sufficient. A purely phenomenological apprehension of theological experience and of theological thinking, grounded in the subjectivity of the human agent, might not do justice to the objectivity of the truth communicated and manifested in such experience and thinking. Thus, theologico-political enquiry ought to take theology seriously, both as a science and as a practice, with all that this implies of the cultural, ritual and material aspects. There may come a time when the alienation of the West from its own traditions may lead to a state where the theological notions, concepts and symbols in all their plurality and variety may not be recognised or easily accessible to the student of political theology, otherwise theological-

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<sup>1</sup> This statement is not to be taken to mean that political theology can only *ever* be comprehended from within the historical context mentioned. Theologico-political themes are no doubt found in the historical experience of other branches of Christianity (for example, Byzantine Christianity and “*Caesaropapism*”, the position of the Armenian and Georgian Churches in the Ottoman and Persian empires, etc.), and indeed, in other civilisations. For the purposes of this study, however, the stress upon the connection between the history of Western Europe and theologico-political thinking and enquiry remains central. In this connection, see below in section B.3 on Maritain’s account of the question.

political themes, with all their subtleties, may be reduced to a set of commonplaces and clichés. For theology itself, as much as politics, is not a univocal concept: a proper political theology must address both natural and revealed theology, and even extend its consideration to exegetical, ascetic and mystical branches theology. Additionally, the attempt must be made to locate the disputes and changes, the unresolvable tensions in the practice and orientation of theology (between churches, or between movements within the same churches) within a general articulation of the theologico-political problem.

Any attempt, therefore, at giving an unambiguous and clear definition of political theology, if at all possible, must be prefaced with an adequate overview of the status quaestionis through an analysis of those works that have had a lasting impact upon the direction and the nature that theologico-political enquiries have assumed at least since the French Revolution, and in particular, the impetus given to the field in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. It must be stressed, however, that the attempt at circumscribing the historical circumstances of the discipline, which is a recurring feature of the present study, is not an end in itself, nor is it a substitute for the theoretical consideration of the truth of theologico-political propositions. The attention to the temporal circumstances in which certain concepts or systems emerged does not here imply the belief that the truth of such concepts or systems is necessarily dependent upon the circumstances. It is the conviction of the author of this thesis that the works of Louis de Bonald contain a wealth of theologico-political tropes that are not simply the reflection of the polemics of a particular age, and that, an extraction and presentation of general philosophical principles from his entire oeuvre is as necessary for a tentative understanding of theologico-political studies as the restitution of the historical context of his engagement as a political theorist.

## **B. Overview of the Status Quaestionis**

It was inevitable that the historical circumstances of the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, marked by two World Wars, would have led men to further engage with theologico-political themes. The restoration of Europe after the Second World War, the liquidation of the colonial empires, and the general reconfiguration of the world order in the context of the Cold War were bound to have an effect on theologico-political studies. The Catholic Church had survived the two World Wars almost unscathed and set out to engage with contemporary ideas in such a sympathetic manner that

signalled a break with the past<sup>2</sup>. The influence of Jacques Maritain and Charles Journet, and of a group of theologians that was hitherto held in deep suspicion by the Roman authorities (the “*Nouvelle Théologie*” movement sought to return to a more patristic style of theologising and to a deeper engagement with the predicaments of modernity), on the proceedings and contents of the Second Vatican Council were rather significant. The pre-eminence of Thomism as the official theological school of the Roman Church was challenged by other strands that were more sympathetic to modern philosophies. The Protestant Churches, especially the German Lutheran Church, also had much cause for self-reflection in the face both of the integrity and heroism of some of its members (Bonhoeffer and the Confessing Church) and of the alliances of others with Nazi dictatorship (the so-called “*German Christians*”). The experiments of the Worker-Priest movement in France led to greater contacts and sympathy between the clergy and theologians on the one hand, and workers and Marxist thinkers on the other. The prospects of cooperation spread to other regions of the globe, including South America, in particular, where a theoretical and practical synthesis between the Marxist critique of capitalism and the evangelical message of Christianity was attempted and pursued under the name of “*Liberation Theology*”. This movement, in its theological component, reflected the influence of certain trends of the *Nouvelle Théologie*, especially in the transcendental method of Karl Rahner, and of his disciples, most notably, Johann Baptist Metz. As with other authors of the *Nouvelle Théologie*, such as Lubac and Congar, but also with a Neo-Thomist such as Maritain, the concern of the more “*modern*” theologians seems to be one of understanding the conditions of modernity in the general framework of theological anthropology and sociology. Francis Schüssler-Fiorenza in 1977 attempted to classify the field into three broad categories corresponding to the above-mentioned movements<sup>3</sup> (German, Liberation Theology, Catholic). He characterises the German variety as one of critical resignation to the changes of modernity, in particular, of secularisation, and as seeking to rise up to meet its challenge while keeping in mind the necessity of the Gospel. The theologico-political theme specific to Liberation theology appears to be a greater demand for Church involvement in politics for the sake of the poor, combined with a Marxist critique of the liberal-market subversion of traditional social structures. In Schüssler-Fiorenza’s classification, Catholic political theology comes out as one-sided: it is presented exclusively in terms of the counter-revolutionary reaction. This not only

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<sup>2</sup> Cf. Sylvio Hermann de Franceschi. *Ambiguïtés historiographiques du théologico-politique. Genèse et fortune d’un concept*. *Revue Historique*, vol.309, fascicule 3(643), pp.653-685: July 2007, p.654.

<sup>3</sup> Francis Schüssler-Fiorenza. *Political Theology as Foundational Theology*. *Proceedings of the Catholic Theological Society of America* 32 (1977), pp.142-177.

ignores the significant overlaps between the afore-mentioned types, but it also neglects the more mainstream work of recognised theologians such as Charles Journet. Furthermore, in view of the developments of theologico-political themes by theoreticians of postmodernity (e.g. Giorgio Agamben), the typology would require some updating. Nevertheless, the positive contribution of Schüssler-Fiorenza lies in his endeavour to articulate the question of political theology in terms of foundational theology. Political theology would thus belong to that area of enquiry where theology is looking at itself, at the conditions in which it produces knowledge, and at the interactions and engagements with politics occasioned by such knowledge. In other words, the self-awareness that foundational theology demands of theology is, by its nature, not merely historical, but also profoundly social.

The development of theologico-political themes is, thus, connected to the changes not only in the understanding of politics but also and above all to those affecting theology. It could well be that, throughout the entire history of West, these two lines of development followed a parallel course to one another punctuated with occasional but significant intersections, or that the development of politics is seen as the periodic recurrence of a movement of union and retreat from the theological. A history of the term “*theology*” and its use in connection with political problems (which is, alas, beyond the scope of this study) would no doubt provide precious insight into this relation. The critique of the truth of myths and fables as carriers of authentic theological meaning, which Plato puts in the mouth of Socrates, was an organic part of an overall critique of society and politics, together with the conceptualisation of a hypothetical model, or pattern, of an ideal city<sup>4</sup>. The Augustinian vision of the two cities itself depends on the critique, modification and appropriation of the classical pagan concepts of theology. With Augustine, the polytheistic foundations of the Varronian tripartite theology (mythical, natural and civil) are exposed and overturned in the service of the monarchy of the one God of the Christian revelation<sup>5</sup>. Thus, he mounts a defence of the correct discourse on the divine contained in revelation against the falsehood found in the pagan rites of the civil religion. True piety lies not in the execution of what Augustine considers to be the truly blasphemous rites of the pagan cities but in the pursuit and cultivation of the correct notion of the divine. It is only in Christianity that this correct notion is to be found, together with an explanation of

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<sup>4</sup> In *The Republic* (379a), Socrates envisions the education of the Guardians as providing them with the “*patterns or norms of right speech about the Gods*”, intimating that the true theology is the one in which the idea of Divine and of the Good has been purified of the false attributes found in the works of the poets.

<sup>5</sup> Augustine of Hippo. *The City of God against the Pagans*. Ed. and trans. by R.W. Dyson. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1998. Books 6 and 7 are specifically devoted to the critique of the *theologia tripartita*.

the sufferings and struggles of this life, and the aspiration towards both earthly and heavenly peace. The only true theology is the Christian theology as much as the only authentically Christian politics is the one that directs the pursuit of the earthly peace to heavenly peace<sup>6</sup>. The cooperation of Christians, as a society, with the non-Christians is couched in terms of the common pursuit of earthly peace, which the Christians know to be ordained to a heavenly peace, which the object of the promise of Christian revelation. A *theologia civilis* properly transformed in a Christian way would require and consist in the profession of the orthodox Christian creed, and in the recognition and pursuit the common good, namely, peace. The transcendence of the heavenly peace to which earthly peace is ordained is a crucial element of Augustine's critique of the pagan city. The restriction of the gods to the city and to nature (in natural theology) immanentises the whole idea of divinity. The sense of transcendence is lost while the city can exact a claim to the total dedication of man's life and limb. For Augustine, on the other hand, all that is earthly is ultimately dependent upon a transcendent realm of divine sovereignty, which is the source of all truth and goodness. The scriptural trope according to which all earthly power is from God is not to be understood simply in terms of the legitimacy of such power, but also in terms of natural and providential dependence<sup>7</sup>. This life is truly, for Augustine, but the course of an earthly pilgrimage towards the one abiding City, in which alone, a lasting peace is to be found and enjoyed. Truth, justice and piety, as manifested and communicated in Christianity, are at the centre of Augustine's worldview, and of his "*political theology*". The natural right of the state is acknowledged, while deemed to be limited by the call and demands of a radical transcendence. This recognition of the natural right of the state, of the political community, within eschatological horizons, will be expanded by Aquinas as part of the theme of the conceptualisation of the relations between grace and nature. Grace is understood as perfecting not obliterating nature. The fixing of the limits of the *sacra doctrina* in the very first question (art.3) of the *Summa Theologica* contains in essence the potentiality of a theologico-political science: theology treats primarily of God, and then only of creatures insofar only as they are referable to God considered as their principle or as their end<sup>8</sup>. All the edifice of natural law will ultimately depend not only on nature as such but also on this relation between God and creatures. Although it forms a subsidiary part of theology as the science of God, this relation, in itself and in its pertinence in political praxis, is essential for a properly theological understanding of theologico-political themes.

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<sup>6</sup> Cf. Augustine of Hippo. *Ibid.* Book 19, chapter 18, pp.946-947.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. John 19:10, 11; Romans 13:1-3; 1 Timothy 2:2; 1 Peter 2:17.

<sup>8</sup> St Thomas Aquinas. *Summa Theologica – Somme Théologique*. Paris: Desclée & Cie 1925, p.31.



## C. Political Theology

### i. Scepticism and Anarchism: Spinoza and Bakunin

The terms “*theologico-political*” and “*political theology*” are not the inventions of recent centuries nor are theologico-political studies entirely new. The publication of Spinoza’s *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* in 1670 was certainly a milestone in the history of theologico-political studies both on account of its explicit title, its contents and of the controversies that it generated. His critique of revealed religion through the critical exegesis of scriptural texts, his advocacy of the separation of philosophy from theology, and his promotion of a positive political control of organised religion, would inspire the ways in which the philosophers of the Enlightenment and the French revolutionaries of the 18<sup>th</sup> century (and their heirs and followers in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, such as Proudhon) would address these subjects<sup>9</sup>. The use of a concept of “*political theology*” can be found, among the heirs of the revolution, in some of the writings of the Franco-Russian revolutionary, Mikhail Bakunin. For Bakunin, the affirmation of God’s existence is also the affirmation of man’s servitude: man can only attain to freedom and integrity when he stops to worship God, and the acceptance of the universal rights of man can only mean the rejection of the rights of God. In order to extirpate superstition, that is, religion from the masses, Bakunin proposes the cultivation of rational science and of socialistic propaganda. The aim of the rational science is to reform the mass of human knowledge by rejecting the claims of metaphysics and the very forms of metaphysical thinking. Metaphysics and theology, Bakunin claims, depend upon an aristocratic methodology of revelation and contemplation that mirrors the *modus operandi* of the hierarchical societies of centralised states, with an ordered chain of command. The alliance of throne and altar of his day (in Imperial Russia; in the struggle for the unification of Italic peninsula) seemed to be in support of a totalising and oppressive nationalistic ideology, which he rejected. For the alliance of church and state was itself but the historical manifestation of an essential similarity between the two institutions, for submission to God was really submission to the men appointed by God to teach other men and to lead them to religious truth. The distinction of the teacher and the taught is analogous to that of the ruler and the ruled. Science and socialism, by virtue of their rationality and universality, were to be the means whereby man would free himself from the

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<sup>9</sup> Cf. Jonathan Israel. *Radical Enlightenment*. Oxford: At the University Press, 2001. The author deals not only with Spinoza’s ideas and influence, but also goes into the specific details of the reception of his works, especially the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*, in the different parts of Europe, through translations and networks of diffusion.

joint oppression of church and state<sup>10</sup>. Bakunin's views on church and state must be taken for what they are: they are more the occasion for the statement of anarchic principles than an intentional description of the historical realities of the relationship between church and state. Indeed, Bakunin's revolt is primarily against an ideal state of synergy between altar and throne that could exist in the wild dreams of the Slavophile party within Russia. But beside this ideal state, he was well aware of real continuities between the theological and the political – continuities that transcended the politics of his day, and which he was willing to put on the account of the enduring hold of superstitions on the human mind. If the political regimes that emerged in the 19<sup>th</sup> century could see in religion a factor for social cohesion, they were no less engaged in the establishment of a legal order that was consistent with the ideology of popular or national sovereignty.

The detheologisation, in favour of which the extreme radicals were agitating, was slowly but surely introduced into the very legal apparatus of the state and of society. The autonomy of the law, which is a resultant of the doctrines of the autonomy of man and of the state, was related to the ideologies of popular or national emancipation and sovereignty that took hold of Europe in the revolutionary fervour of 1848.

## **ii. Juridical Political Theology: Carl Schmitt**

Carl Schmitt (1888-1985), as a jurist who was born in the later part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, grew up in Imperial Germany, saw its defeat in the First World War and witnessed the transition to the Weimar Republic, was acutely aware of this detheologisation of the juridical order. He dealt with this particular problem and with other theologico-political subjects in many, if not most, of his works, including *Political Romanticism* (1919), *The Dictatorship* (1921), *Political Theology* (1922), *Roman Catholicism and Political Form* (1923), *The Concept of the Political* (1932) and *Political Theology II* (1969-1970). While it could be argued that Spinoza created the modern genre of theologico-political speculation, political philosophers and publicists did not pay much heed to it, nor was it in any need of it as such, having already internalised the Spinozist critique of all revealed religion<sup>11</sup>. Carl Schmitt played a crucial role in the revival the

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<sup>10</sup> Mikhail Bakunin. *Fédéralisme, socialisme et antithéologisme*, in *Œuvres, tome 1. Bibliothèque sociologique*, N° 4. Paris: PV Stock Editeurs, 1895, pp.68-70. This edition of his works also contain his other theologico-political pamphlets such as “*Dieu et l'état*” (tome 1) and “*La Réponse d'un International a Mazzini*” (tome 6). This latter was incorporated in his “*La Théologie politique de Mazzini et l'Internationale*” published in 1871.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Franceschi, op.cit., p.659.

genre has experienced in the previous century, so much so that even to this day, the very approach to the subject requires a treatment of his contribution.

In *Political Theology* (1922), Schmitt's starting point for the articulation of his political theology was first through a formulation of his own notion of sovereignty accompanied by a critique of the normativist understanding of the concept of sovereignty put forward, and then, through the development of the secularisation thesis. To the normativist understanding of an abstract or pure legal order that is grounded upon a basic norm, above which there was no superior norm, opposed a decisionist understanding wherein sovereignty consisted in the ability to derogate to the existing juridical order and define the exception to the law. In Schmitt's own words: "*The decision on the exception is a decision in the true sense of the word. Because a general norm, as represented by an ordinary legal prescription, can never encompass a total exception, the decision that a real decision exists cannot therefore be entirely derived from this norm*".<sup>12</sup> If the exception is taken to refer to a situation that occurs outside the criteria and provisions of the legal order, then any understanding of sovereignty in purely normative terms is deficient. Sovereignty, by its nature, that is, by necessity, operates both within and outside the prescribed limits of the juridical order. As such it cannot be defined simply in terms of the highest norms of that order. Sovereignty is never that of laws as such, for laws, even the highest among them, require the instrumentality of a human agent in order to be promulgated and to be applied. The system of laws within a political society is not *sui juris*: it is neither self-generated, nor is it self-applicable. The juridical order is to be understood not so much in terms of a hierarchy of independently operative norms as in those of a hierarchy of agency culminating in that agent in whom the powers of supreme derogation to this order is vested. The sovereign is the person in the state who can both create the legal order, through the promulgation of norms, and transcend it, through the decision on the exception to the order. Schmitt believed that the liberal order established in Germany after the defeat of 1919 intended to "*repress the question of sovereignty*" by subjecting the Reichspräsident's emergency powers to the control of the Reichstag.<sup>13</sup> The question of sovereignty is repressed precisely through the introduction of measures designed to collectivise the competency to decide upon the exception, and which, in practice, aim at making it extremely difficult to reach that decision. It could well be that what Schmitt alleges to be the liberal occultation of the nature of sovereignty proceeds from the liberal need to identify the state with a particular legal order.

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<sup>12</sup> Carl Schmitt. *Political Theology: Four Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty*. Translation of *Politische Theologie. Vier Kapitel zur Lehre von der Souveränität*, 1922. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005, p.6.

<sup>13</sup> Schmitt. *ibid.*, p.11.

Thus, any period of emergency wherein the state still continues to exist while the legal order is suspended, would point to the true nature of sovereignty and the true locus of authority within the political society. Furthermore, the care with which liberal constitutions endeavour to circumscribe and provide for the exercise of emergency powers is a tacit recognition of the fact that the legal order can indeed be suspended, and that when it happens, the separation between the state and itself will be made manifest. However, this care can be understood as the legal order preparing the terms of its own suspension in order to ensure its survival once the suspension has been lifted. Beyond a question of their separation during the exception, it would seem that the problem of sovereignty viewed from a decisionist perspective reveals the difference between the political community as such and the regime of norms that may be transposed upon it. Thus, it is possible that the greatest challenge for liberal regimes, or for any regime that rests upon a priori normativist principles, is to make the legal order coincide with the state.

The third chapter of *Political Theology*, is entitled “*Political Theology*” in which Schmitt expounds the elements of his theologico-political doctrine at length. The first paragraph itself deserves to be quoted in its entirety as it seems to express both the normative and the programmatic aspects of a theologico-political science: “*All significant concepts of the modern theory of the state are secularized theological concepts not only because of their historical development – in which they were transferred from theology to the theory of the state, whereby for example, the omnipotent God became the omnipotent lawgiver – but also because of their systematic structure, the recognition of which is necessary for a sociological consideration of these concepts. The exception in jurisprudence is analogous to the miracle in theology. Only by being aware of this analogy can we appreciate the manner in which the philosophical ideas of the state developed in the last centuries*”.<sup>14</sup> The secularisation thesis is here formulated in terms of a determinism that unites the course of European political history with the structure and the content of the intellectual engagement and reflection upon politics. As such the secularisation thesis, or the process of secularisation, offers a tool for the understanding of the history of political ideas. Schmitt’s demonstration of the thesis takes the form of an a posteriori schematisation of the changes that characterised the development of European thinking on the political<sup>15</sup>. But beyond this descriptive function, the thesis is also deeply critical. The definition of sovereign as the one who decides on the exception sets for the ground for the development

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<sup>14</sup> Schmitt, *ibid.*, p.36.

<sup>15</sup> Montserrat Herrero. *The Political Discourse of Carl Schmitt: A Mystic of Order*. London: Rowman & Littlefield International 2015, pp.158-159.

of political theology as the type of enquiry that considers the problem of power, authority, legitimacy, and, indeed, sovereignty in terms of an analogy between the concepts of theology and politics. In the course of the process of secularisation, the very possibility of analogy is precluded by the claims of detheologisation that operate within the ideology of progress and of man's emancipation from religion. The normativist liberal theory of sovereignty through its identification of the state with the liberal legal order conceals not merely the decisionary nature of real sovereignty but also downplays the possible analogy between political and divine sovereignty.

As much as the Enlightenment rejected miracles, that is, direct divine interventions outside of the scope of the laws of the natural world, the liberal regimes rejected the personal and decisionary authority of a monarch, whether hereditary or elected. But the example of the analogy between the miracle and the exception is only one feature of a broader domain of analogy between the theology and the juristic. For Schmitt, it was Leibniz who first recognised the striking similarities between the juristic and the theological<sup>16</sup>. In both of these, a dual principle seems to obtain: on the one hand, reason or nature (natural theology and natural law), and on the other, scripture and written laws (divine commandments and positive laws). It was the Catholic authors of the counter-revolution who, in the context of the revolutionary turmoil of the late 18<sup>th</sup> century and of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, developed the themes of the analogical convergence of the political and the theological. These "*Catholic philosophers of the counter-revolution*" are Bonald, Maistre and Donoso Cortes, in whose works Schmitt recognises "*a conceptually clear and systematic analogy, and not merely that kind of playing with ideas, whether mystical, natural-philosophical, or even romantic, which, as with everything else, so also with state and society, yields colourful symbols and pictures*".<sup>17</sup> In this endorsement of these particular writers and the rejection of other types or styles of approaching the subject, Schmitt identifies his own project with the rigorous and clear method of the "*Catholic philosophers of the counter-revolution*". In the rest of the chapter, contrasts this methodical approach to political theology, understood as a sociology of concepts, with other attempts, past or contemporary, at apprehending the nature of the state. In this sustained critique of Kelsen, Schmitt argues that the analogy of theological and juridical concepts cannot be analysed by applying the method of the natural sciences. Such analysis would only be partial and would fail to take into account the nature of the similarity (and difference) between the two sets of

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<sup>16</sup> Schmitt, *ibid.*, p.37.

<sup>17</sup> Schmitt, *ibid.*, p.37.

concepts. For the method of the natural sciences, based upon the scepticism of the Enlightenment, is inherently critical of the possibility of the truth of theological propositions. It would fail to do justice to the meaning ascribed to theological concepts. Unless, of course, one's aim was precisely to promote a particular concept of the juridical (and of the political) defined by its emancipation from theological thinking.

The question of the relations between the theological and juridical disciplines and domains of thought is also connected to the question of the causal relation between the philosophical ideas of the Enlightenment and the political conditions of the revolutionary era. For Schmitt, both the spiritualist deterministic philosophy of history and the materialistic one, taken separately, inevitably tend to *"construct a contrast between two spheres, and then they dissolve this contrast into nothing by reducing one to the other"*.<sup>18</sup> The Schmittian sociology of concept, on the other hand, aims at considering both simultaneously without reducing the one to the other: *"It aims to discover the basic, radically systematic structure and to compare this conceptual structure with the conceptually represented social structure of a certain epoch. There is no question here of whether the idealities produced by radical conceptualisation are a reflex of sociological reality, or whether social reality is conceived of as the result of a particular kind of thinking and therefore also of acting"*.<sup>19</sup> Thus, the concern here is with the simultaneous comprehension and demonstration of *"two spiritual but at the same time substantial identities"*. The sociology of concepts aims at showing the correspondence between particular juridical concepts with the wider and dominant social ideologies of the various epochs of history. This correspondence expresses itself in the systemic agreement between the structural concepts of one politics with the metaphysical concepts of theology: *"The metaphysical image that a definite epoch forges of the world has the same structure as what the world immediately understands to be appropriate as a form of its political organisation"*.<sup>20</sup> Every successive stage of the secularisation of the European mind-set is accompanied by a consistency between dominant beliefs and the political organisation of European society. Throughout the process, the gradual expulsion of the idea of a transcendent God from the public life of societies proceeds concomitantly with the immanentisation of the notion of sovereignty (and, therefore, legitimacy) as developed by Bodin and Hobbes. This immanentisation is itself really the application of the doctrine of *"popular sovereignty"* to the concept of sovereignty as such. In democratic constitutions, the supreme decisionary agency is immanentised and neutralised,

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<sup>18</sup> Schmitt, *ibid.*, p.43.

<sup>19</sup> Schmitt, *ibid.*, p.45.

<sup>20</sup> Schmitt, *ibid.*, p.46.

through the depersonalisation characterising the economic and technical organisation of society, and the conversation or discussion about literary and philosophical commonplaces that never end and are never resolved<sup>21</sup>. Thus, the problem of politics, which depends upon the decision between moral opposites, is also forever delayed and never solved. At such a juncture, even the question of legitimacy disappears before the absolute imperative of the decision, which can only be the act of a dictator. In other words, the survival of the state depends on its monopoly on politics understood as the supreme exercise in decision.

Schmitt did not confine the application of his theologico-political sociology of concept to the problem of sovereignty. In *Roman Catholicism and Political Form*, the book immediately published after *Political Theology* in 1923, he renews his criticism of the technical and economic depoliticised world dominated by liberalism by pointing to certain aspects of the Roman Catholic Church. Against the inward-looking and world-denying nature of Protestantism that is ever retreating to the private sphere, the Catholic Church places itself in the arena of public life and organises itself as a public entity with juridical personality: “*The political power of Catholicism rests neither on economic nor on military means but rather on the absolute realization of authority. (...) the Church is the consummate agency of the juridical spirit and the true heir of Roman jurisprudence. Therein - in its capacity to assume juridical form - lies one of its sociological secrets*”.<sup>22</sup> The connection between the Roman Church and “*political form*” proceeds from the Church’s power of representation, in that it represents both the living, historical connection with the central dogmas of the Christian faith, but also the city of man. This is what make of it, in Schmitt’s view a *complexion oppositorum*, a place where opposites coincide. In a way, the Church unites its “*person*” both the scriptural tropes of the heavenly and earthly Jerusalem with the unique Roman legal spirit. The unity and cohesion of the juridical and bureaucratic organisation of the Church, united with a particular notion of authority made it both the object of the envy and of the hatred of those forces which promoted the detheologisation of politics. The depersonalised notion of representation, derived from this detheologisation of politics inherent in the liberal-economic social model, has deprived democratic institution of any real power in purely political terms.

In purely human terms, it is precisely this autonomous capacity for juridical self-understanding and self-organisation that has enabled the Church to navigate historical change. For it is a

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<sup>21</sup> Cf. Schmitt, *ibid.*, p.65.

<sup>22</sup> Schmitt. *Roman Catholicism and Political Form (Römischer Katholizismus und politische Form, 1923)*. Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1996, pp.18-19.

capacity that lends itself to adaptation while maintaining the hierarchical structure of authority. For Schmitt, the liberal-economic “*politics*” of the regimes of the early 1920s was no politics at all: it is merely the management of the processes of production and consumption, determined by the capitalistic structuring of the world economy. In his opinion, the accommodation of the Church with such regimes will only be fruitful and advantageous for the Church when and if those regimes gain political form. Should they even, due to historical circumstances, lose it after having struck such an alliance, the Church would still be able to provide for what is lacking in the state, namely, a principle of authority<sup>23</sup>. This imperative for the state to find political form derives from the theory of the *societas perfecta*, of the two perfect societies, according to which, the Church and the state are meant to coexistence together as perfect societies. How can the state be a perfect society if it is wanting in the formal condition of the political form and in the exercise of representation? The absence of political form in the state will result in an inevitable imbalance in the relationship between the two societies. The worst that could happen for society would be the simultaneous retreat both of religion and of the state in the private sphere through the depoliticisation of institutions and the privatisation of beliefs. Then, political form would be truly absent from the public organisation of society, and the liberal project, in Schmitt’s view, would have arrived at its conclusion. Against the critics of the Roman Church (here Dostoevsky), he points out that even the juridical mode of the Church’s representation of Christ is oriented towards the eschatological form of the Last Judgement. The juridical conception of the Church together with the Christian pursuits of peace and justice presents a truly unique historical instantiation of the *complexio oppositorum*, which itself is but an element in the formalised dualistic structure that pervades the whole of Schmitt’s thought, together with the friend-enemy distinction, and later, the emphasis of duality in the very Godhead. The very structure of secularisation itself implies the distinction between that which is to be secularised, that is ever liable to secularisation over and against that which is already secularised. The dialectical nature of the sociology of concept here emerges as one of the enduring characteristics of Schmitt’s political theology.

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<sup>23</sup> Schmitt, op.cit., p.25.



### iii. Two Responses to Schmitt: Peterson and Blumenberg

In this section, two responses, more or less direct, to the political theology elaborated by Schmitt (especially as contained in *Political Theology* of 1922) will be analysed. The merit of these two responses is that they are not merely reactive: they carry with them, or were written in the context of, truly original contributions to the study of theologico-political themes.

#### Erik Peterson

Erik Peterson, a Lutheran convert to Catholicism, had established his academic reputation in the study of the texts and practices of Christian antiquity. While still a Lutheran, he was involved in the debates regarding modernism (such as propounded by Harnack and Bultmann) and other, more conservatively oriented, currents (as articulated in the works of Barth) that prevalent or emergent in Lutheran, or broadly, Protestant theology<sup>24</sup>. Even after his conversion, he carried on with his reflections on the nature of the church, which were the occasions of mild controversies among his new co-religionists. It was in 1935 that he published the essay entitled: *“Monotheism as a Political Problem: A Contribution to the History of Political Theology in the Roman Empire”*. Peterson starts by surveying the connections between the concepts of monarchy and monotheism in the ancient Greek classical tradition, particular in Aristotle’s analogy between the necessity for a single principle in the universe and human monarchical rule, as expressed in the famous quotation from the *Iliad*, quoted at the end of Book XII of the *Metaphysics*: *“Beings do not want to be governed badly; ‘the rule of many is not good, let one be ruler’”*.<sup>25</sup> Aristotle’s analogy is fundamentally metaphysical inasmuch as his notion of God is that of the ultimate cause and end of the entire universe, *“the transcendent goal (telos) of all movement, and only in that sense king, only in that sense monarch”*.<sup>26</sup> After Aristotle, starting with the pseudo-Aristotelian treatise *De Mundo*, the transcendently causal ground of the analogy becomes more immanent as the powers of God are conceived as acting in a very direct manner in the world, while God himself remains outside of the world. Here, Peterson contrasts a putative Aristotelian unity (cosmic power deriving from the divine principle) that itself would make of divine monarchy the principle of political authority, on the one hand, with a distinction between power and principle based on Platonic dualism, in which case, the relation between

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<sup>24</sup> This section relies principally on the translation of Peterson’s *Theologische Traktate* (originally published in 1951) by Michael Hollerich entitled *“Theological Tractates”* published at the Stanford University Press in 2011. Some details of Peterson’s biography may also be gleaned from this book.

<sup>25</sup> Erik Peterson. *Theological Tractates*. Trans. Michael Hollerich. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011, p.69.

<sup>26</sup> Peterson, op.cit., p.70.

the activities of kingship and those of the Demiurge would be radically different, not comparable and not liable of being analogised. With the Stoics, and later, Philo of Alexandria, the meaning of the divine activity in the world is likened to that of the ruler of a city: it is the world itself that is likened to a city (*polis*) and God deemed to be its leader and king (*hegemon kai basileus*). But for Philo, the issue is not merely one of an analogy between natural theology and politics as such. For “*he is interested in neither the question of the unity or multiplicity of metaphysical principles*” given that “*the theologico-political problem is set against the background of Judaism*”. Philo is concerned primarily with the explanation of the Jewish teaching on monotheism as contained in the Jewish Law (the *Torah*) to an audience of Hellenistic proselytes. The expression “*monarchy*” thus comes to designate the specific content of the Jewish revelation, namely, the oneness of God, with all its theologico-political implications. And, it is as such, according to Peterson, that the expression is transmitted to early Christianity, as evidenced in the works of Justin Martyr. Divine monarchy, in this sense, becomes a motif of Christian apologetics in the debates with pagans. However, by virtue of the very developments of the Christian beliefs in the divinity of Christ in the ante-Nicene period, the concept of a divine monarchy became more problematic. How could the divine monarchy be preserved while at the same time professing the trinity of divine persons? In the 3<sup>rd</sup> century A.D., Pope Dionysius of Rome, in a letter addressing the Sabellianist movement, refers back to the Aristotelian notion when he writes of the divine monarchy not in terms of kingly rule but in terms of first principle: the Father, as first principle, was never without the Logos and the Holy Ghost. Thus, for Pope Dionysius, monarchy was to be understood cosmologically and metaphysically, and not politically<sup>27</sup>. This is the path that would be followed in the next century by the Cappadocian Fathers (Basil the Great, Gregory of Nazianzus, and Gregory of Nyssa) in their articulation and defence of Nicene trinitarianism against Arians and Semi-Arians. However, against the pagans such as Celsus who argued that Christianity was ultimately subversive both of the established order of the Roman Empire, the Christians apologists had to show the transcendental continuity between the church and the empire. Eusebius of Caesarea, following Origen of Alexandria (who debated against Celsus) would seek to reintroduce the notion of the political monarchy by an articulation of a philosophy of history whereby the coming of Christ and the pacification of the *oikoumené* or inhabited world by the Roman Empire were seen as necessarily concomitant events of world history. The universalism of the Christian religion, based upon religious monotheism, is compared to the universalism of the

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<sup>27</sup> Cf. Peterson, op.cit., p.89.

Roman Empire, which dissolves national particularism and unites all peoples under the monarchy of the emperor. With the promulgation of the Edict of Milan and the defeat of Licinius in 313 by Constantine, “*political monarchy was re-established and at the same time the divine Monarchy was secured*”.<sup>28</sup> In Eusebius’s theology of history, the advent of Augustus after the last Civil Wars of the Roman Republic foreshadowed and prepared the advent of Christ. One brought about earthly peace while the other was himself the Prince of Peace. With Constantine, the two strands of world history were, as it were, united together, in preparation for the second coming of Christ. As it will be seen in Chapter II, this providential understanding of the Roman Empire would remain if only to be adapted in the self-understanding of mediaeval Western Christendom and the subsequent theories regarding the *translatio imperii*. Eventually, however, the weakness of the Eusebian political theology or “*Augustus theology*”, as Peterson called it, would be revealed in the barbarian attacks against Rome in the late 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> centuries until its collapse. For Peterson, the pagan polemicists were right: orthodox Nicene Christianity had appeared as a revolt against the metaphysical and political foundations of the Roman Empire. Arian Christianity, on the other hand, with its unequivocal idea of the idea of divine monarchy, which was exclusive of the divinity of Christ, appealed to the political sense of the Roman emperors who supported it. In Peterson’s words, “*Orthodox Trinitarian doctrine in effect threatened the political theology of the Roman Empire*”.<sup>29</sup> It was left to Gregory of Nazianzus to synthesise the doctrine of monarchy with that of the Trinity. In the third of his famous *Theological Orations*, he argued that the in the Christian confession of the divine monarchy, the latter term must not be understood to apply to only one person of the Trinity, but rather that it apply all three persons who are bound together by the unity of essence. Such a conception of unity has no equivalent, no correspondence in the order of creation<sup>30</sup>. And it is precisely because of the proclamation of this Trinitarian dogma, of triunity, which exists only in the Godhead, that the possibility of any Christian political theology based upon monotheism is foreclosed. As much as Gregory had disposed of the theological arguments for a Christian political theology of the Roman Empire, Peterson would argue that it was Augustine who would question the Eusebian understanding of the Augustan peace, and wider theology of history, in his treatise on the City of God.

What comes out of Peterson’s rich demonstrations is that the theologico-political theme of the divine monarchy is radically changed in the proclamation of the Trinitarian dogma. With the

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<sup>28</sup> Peterson, *ibid.*, p.94, quoting Eusebius’s “*Life of Constantine*” (2.19).

<sup>29</sup> Peterson, *op.cit.*, p.103.

<sup>30</sup> Peterson, *ibid.*, p.103.

introduction (or, from a theological perspective, the revelation) of the trinity of persons within the divine unity, the ground for the analogy between the divine government of the world and the human government of the city disappears. For a monotheism (such as that retained by the Enlightenment) and a divine monarchy that does not take the Trinitarian dogma into account and somehow cannot alter the ground of analogy to accommodate it becomes utterly indefensible from a Christian theological perspective. The similarity is reduced to shared semantic signs with corresponding assonant, if not dissonant, concepts. For Peterson, a deep equivocity attends any attempt at a Christian political theology. The continuity between the image of the government of the world and the image of the government of the city is suppressed, and a radical difference between politics and theology is affirmed. In his essay “*Christ as Emperor*”, Peterson argues that the Christian appropriation of imperial symbolism in the Book of Revelation and in subsequent Christian authors is meant as an implicit challenge to human rulership: “*the juxtaposition of Christ with the emperor is not some timeless piece of symbolism but a polemical symbol of an actual struggle*”.<sup>31</sup> Christ is the emperor, the military commander leading his troops, leads his army of martyrs to fight the powers of the world not with swords and weapons but in the confession of faith in his kingship. The eschatological horizon of the outcome of this struggle is unmistakable, for “*the Church regards Christ as emperor in anticipation of his kingship of the world to come*”.<sup>32</sup> The Christian appropriation of the symbols of emperors and kingly rule, and their attribution to Christ is neither because of the continuity between the Empire and the kingdom of Christ, nor yet because there is a need to legitimise the Empire upon theological grounds. The eschatological perspective expressed here meant that the struggle was not to be on the usual human terms of armed confrontation. The liturgy as the work of the Church in anticipation of the kingdom evoked and invoked the membership of the angels, past martyrs, and the saints in the Church triumphant. And this work of anticipation itself is based upon the Christian profession of faith and the witness to Christ’s kingship. So, it is the Church, as the supratemporal body of all believers, of martyrs and of angels that is identical, or at least, continuous with the Kingdom.

The foreclosure of political theology put forward by Peterson is inherently theological, that is, it is inscribed in a worldview that is strictly theological – the apprehension of the political is, therefore, also strictly theological, and strictly limited in its historical scope. This is so because he had to demonstrate how early on in the history of the Church the development and

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<sup>31</sup> Erik Peterson. *Christ as Emperor*, in *Theological Tractates*, vide supra, p.147.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., p.150.

stabilisation of the Trinitarian dogma precluded the possibility of theologico-political analogy of continuity not only as understood by Schmitt, but more generally. His demonstration of the theological impossibility of a political theology is nonetheless directed explicitly at Schmitt whose arguments in *Political Theology* (1922) he characterised as being not systematic<sup>33</sup>. A part of Schmitt's arguments in his treatise *Political Theology II* is directed to Peterson's critique.<sup>34</sup> What Schmitt reproaches Peterson is that the latter has constructed on the basis of a theological formalisation of the arguments put forward in *Political Theology* (1922) a definition of political theology as such that is limited both in its substantial content and formal description. The foreclosure of political theology limited to the 4<sup>th</sup> century thus precludes the very existence of certain modes of theologico-political themes from a Christian perspective throughout history. For Schmitt, it is clear that Peterson failed to appreciate that what he was doing in the treatise of 1922 was to delineate a historical sociology of juridical concepts on the basis of an analogy with theological concepts, not from a theological perspective, but from a juridical one. Peterson's dismissal of Schmitt's treatise is itself theological, or indeed, religious, and raises the question of the right relation between disciplines, in this case, theology and jurisprudence. It is in the interdisciplinary arena where canon law and civil or secular law meet that Schmitt situates the first *Political Theology*.<sup>35</sup> It is therefore a question of competence – who and on what authority can one pretend to write any *political theology*? Or, as he himself put it: “*Who answers in concreto, on behalf of the concrete autonomously acting human being, the question of what is spiritual, what is worldly and what is the case with the res mixtae, which, in the interval between the first and the second arrival of the Lord, constitute, as a matter of fact, the entire earthly existence of this spiritual-worldly, spiritual-temporal, double-creature called a human being?*”<sup>36</sup>

It could be countered that Schmitt at first refuses to address Peterson's critique, on theological grounds, by taking refuge in the “*thickets of the law*”<sup>37</sup> qua discipline, and reduces everything to his formulation of decisionism. He did respond by giving his own interpretation of the passage from Gregory of Nazianzus (*Third Theological Oration*, ii) that Peterson used to express the foreclosure of any Christian political theology. Schmitt focuses on a part of a sentence where Gregory is discussing the action of the One (or Unity) in producing plurality:

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<sup>33</sup> Cf. The last footnote to “*Monotheism as Political Problem*”, pp.233-234, in op.cit.

<sup>34</sup> Schmitt, *Political Theology II: The Myth of the Closure of Any Political Theology*. Originally published in 1970. Cambridge: Polity Press 2008.

<sup>35</sup> Schmitt, *Political Theology II. Chapter 3: The Legendary Conclusion*, p.109.

<sup>36</sup> Schmitt, *ibid.*, p.115.

<sup>37</sup> Robert Bolt. *A Man for all Seasons*. From Act 1. London: Heinemann 1960, p.39.

“to *Hen stasiazon pros heauton polla kathistasthai*”. He translates “to *Hen stasiazon pros heauton*” as “the One is always in uproar against itself”.<sup>38</sup> Whereas for Peterson, the recourse to Gregory was meant to show the stability of the theological dogma of the Trinity, Schmitt sees in this uproar of the One against itself the very possibility of instability within the deity, compounded by the fact that the word *stasis*, from which the verb *stasiazon* is derived, can be interpreted either as rest or unrest (or still, revolution or civil war). Gregory’s notion implies that the divine life itself is fraught with dialectical tension, which would make of it the locus, indeed, the primeval locus of conflict, and therefore, of the friend-enemy distinction. The conflict would be between a God of creation and a God of redemption, or between the God of the New and the God of the New Testament. This putative theologico-political stasiology (discourse on revolution or unrest) would, however, be based not on the orthodox resolution of dualism and plurality within the deity, but on Gnostic dualism that posits the absoluteness of the duality. Nevertheless, it is this structural problem of Gnostic dualism that remains at the heart of earthly conflicts in an immanentised form: here, Schmitt moves from a divine stasiology to a political one. Ultimately, politics is a contest between those who want change (the image of the redeemer god) and those who resist it (the image of the creator god): both the Reformation and the revolutionary movements, and the responses to them, can be understood in terms of this duality. It should be clear that Schmitt is looking at the latent political problem of plurality within the deity from a formal and structural perspective, whereas Peterson’s thesis of foreclosure proceeds from a profession of faith in the orthodox definitions of the Trinity. The latter is clearly not concerned with the political consequences of this choice, namely the exclusive profession of a doctrine. Or, rather, from his essays on the Church, the angels and Christ<sup>39</sup>, it is clear that he is resigned to the eventuality of martyrdom for those who subscribe to revelation in an absolute sense, but even there the potentially political decision to inflict martyrdom is seen *sub specie aeternitatis*. He refuses to be drawn in the decisionary question that Schmitt seems to find at the heart of the *res mixtae*, in the juridical interface shared by church and state. Peterson’s conclusion on the foreclosure of any political theology is, however, not a denial of the legitimacy of theologico-political reflection. But such reflection can never be resigned to a state of theological indifference or neutrality with respect to the substance of the theologico-political themes to be studied. Peterson denies the possibility of theological

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<sup>38</sup> Cf. Carl Schmitt, *ibid.*, pp.122-125.

<sup>39</sup> Vide *supra*: in the *Theological Tractates*.

neutrality, seeing history as the foreground for the cosmic battle between truth and falsehood, whereas for Schmitt, all claims to neutrality are inherently political.

His is a negative or anti-political theology that locates the ultimate ground of conflict not in God, but in creation, between the city of God and the city of man. The Augustinian influence is palpable in the entire essay, even though the Bishop of Hippo is sparingly mentioned<sup>40</sup>. But St Augustine and the other authorities mentioned by Peterson either only knew a pagan state that was hostile to Christianity or one in which the relations between the emperors and a legalised Christianity were ever volatile. It appears, therefore, that the foreclosure does not take into account what would turn out to be the mediaeval experience of the Christian city. And it this city that would remain the pattern from which modernity would seek to emancipate itself.

### **Hans Blumenberg**

It was precisely this emancipation and the autonomous world of self-representation that Blumenberg, the noted philosopher and historian of ideas, wanted to vindicate. Blumenberg's book "*The Legitimacy of the Modern Age*"<sup>41</sup> was originally directed towards Karl Löwith's views on the secular expressed in the latter's book from 1949, "*Meaning in History*".<sup>42</sup> For Löwith, the modern age still carries within itself the seed of the conflict within Christianity and paganism, and its historical self-understanding retains secularised elements (the idea of progress as secularised eschatology) that properly belong to the Christian worldview. Modernity is, in this, respect seen as an illegitimate offshoot of the Christian tradition, for modern history so far has shown itself to be "*Christian by derivation and anti-Christian by consequence*".<sup>43</sup> This anti-Christian aspect of modern history is paradoxically due to the application of Christian principles, whereby the desacralisation of the world operated by Christianity comes to be applied to Christianity itself. This derivation of modernity out of Christianity implied a substantial unity and continuity of history that precluded the eruption of the genuine emancipation and autonomy of the human sphere at once from the physical itself, and from the past. Rather, for Blumenberg, the similarity between the modern and pre-modern western civilisations is due to the reoccupation by modernity of concepts, symbols and spaces

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<sup>40</sup> Peterson put a quotation from St Augustine's "*De Vera Religione*" as an epigram at the incipit of the essay, together with an indirect invocation in the "*Prefatory Note*": op.cit., p.68.

<sup>41</sup> Hans Blumenberg, *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press 1985.

<sup>42</sup> Karl Löwith, *Meaning in History*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press 1949.

<sup>43</sup> Cf. Löwith, *ibid.*, p.202.

that Christianity had relinquished. With the advent of the Copernican revolution and the fragmentation of the mediaeval church into denominations, Christianity was revealed in its failure to provide a true image of the world to man. It was incapable of answering man's deepest questions about the world and his place in the world. With the cosmotheological venture of Christianity and its failure, the consciousness of man *"has been overextended then disappointed in regard to the great questions and great hopes"*.<sup>44</sup> The reoccupation itself was not an act of continuity with Christianity but one of historical opportunity, and the fact that, through the secularisation theorem, the legitimacy of this reoccupation is question shows there was no *"successful transition to self-disposition"*. This was certainly enabled by the persistence within language of metaphors, and, indeed, one could say fictions that are mistaken for the signs of a hidden meaning, and the perdurance of a pre-modern substance within modernity itself. Blumenberg finds that the secularisation theorem finds its strongest statement in Schmitt's first *Political Theology* in the proposition: *"all the significant concepts of the modern doctrine of the state are secularized theological concepts"*.<sup>45</sup> Sovereignty understood as the decision on the exception is one such significant concept (if not the most significant in that particular treatise), which also at the same time points to a particular failure of the Enlightenment in the elaboration of modern politics. This, for Blumenberg, it is not so much the evidence of a secularised theological concept as that of a *"dualistic typology of situations"*<sup>46</sup> united in the common employment of the same metaphor of sovereignty. The persistence of metaphors, during the French Revolution, for example, pertains to the requirements to perform the tasks dictated by the imperatives of the times: *"it is a choice of elements from the selective point of view of the immediate need, (...), for background and pathos"*.<sup>47</sup> Basing himself on Schmitt's own statement to the effect that his assertions on political theology have been *"about a systematic structural kinship between theological and juristic concepts that obtrudes itself both in legal theory and legal practice"*,<sup>48</sup> Blumenberg argues that this *"formulation reduces to the secularisation thesis to the concept of structural analogy"*, and that, while this systematic structural kinship makes something visible (the relation between the concepts), it *"no longer implies any assertion about the derivation of the one structure from the other or of both from a common prototype"*.<sup>49</sup> The structures are neither

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<sup>44</sup> Blumenberg, *ibid.*, p.89.

<sup>45</sup> Vide *supra*, *Political Theology* (1922), p.36.

<sup>46</sup> Blumenberg, *op cit.*, p.92.

<sup>47</sup> Blumenberg, *ibid.*, pp.93-94.

<sup>48</sup> Schmitt, Note 2 to Chapter 3 of *Political Theology II*, p.148.

<sup>49</sup> Blumenberg, both excerpts *ibid.*, p.94.



temporally nor substantially continuous with one another – in other words, they are neither essentially cotemporal nor consubstantial. It is possible to acknowledge the justice of these assertions while at the same time maintaining the integrity of certain aspects of Schmitt's political theology. For what is at stake in the debate on political theology between Blumenberg and Schmitt is not so much the question of secularisation as that of the similarity between politics and theology, between jurisprudence and canon law. The secularisation thesis is meant to explain how the structural analogy between the theological and the political is made present in society. It is not itself the explanatory core of political theology. For either the structural analogy stands or it does not – the intrinsic relation between the substances have to be necessary, while the relation between their respective outward forms is left to the contingency of historical situations, as Schmitt pointed out in *Roman Catholicism and Political Form*. The secularisation thesis is an attempt to pierce through the historical contingencies, and arrive at the proper relation, or better, ground of comparison between theology and politics. It is also because the relation is an analogical one, safeguarding the ontological, and therefore causal, distinction between the domains, that any political theology is at all possible. Instead of conceiving of the similarity between the domains in terms of shared attributes, Schmitt instead stresses the comparable systematic structures, and the proper proportionality between the analogates. God's creative relationship to the cosmos is not a metaphor for political sovereignty, neither is the miracle a metaphor for the exception. What God is the cosmos, so the sovereign is to the polity, and what miracle is to the natural order, so the exception is to the legal order. Yet, it could be countered that for political theology to be properly theological, and not simply conceptually descriptive, it would need to include a consideration of the attributes of God, and how these attributes come to be instantiated in the political realm. Thus, the use and understanding of analogy will depend ultimately on one's understanding of the nature and goals of political theology. For Blumenberg's attitude to political theology is one of mild indifference as long as it is not intrinsically directed at contesting the legitimacy of modernity. Even if it be granted there is no necessary connection between political theology, the secularisation thesis and the argument of the illegitimacy of the modern world still does not and cannot preclude the critical assessment of this modernity on the basis of the metaphysical structure of politics. That Blumenberg seems to overlook this possibility follows from his univocal understanding of modernity as emancipation from all metaphysical modes of questioning such that any metaphysics and any theology are no more possible as adequate accounts of the world. The denial of scientific status to theology and to political theology ensures that they are properly neutralised and made harmless with respect to the claims of

modernity. It is questionable not only whether this could happen on Blumenberg's terms, that is, organically and progressively, or more importantly, whether it could happen in a manner that would prevent the friend-enemy distinction from being shown to be operative. In other words, the detheologisation, and for Schmitt, the inevitably concomitant depoliticisation, of the world must itself proceed from a political decision. Thus, it is not certain that the modern age could ever avoid from being described from the perspective of what it opposes and rejects. And in this, the situation is comparable to that between Christianity and ancient paganism, in that the former will never be able to avoid being understood in the light of the latter. But this, as such, is not a problem for Christianity as it locates its ultimate ground of legitimacy both inside and outside of history.

#### **iv. Ecclesiological Political Theology: Maritain and Journet**

As much as the focus of juridical political theology was primarily the state and political form, that of ecclesiological political theology is primarily either Christianity, or the Church and its relations not only to the state or politics, but to the world more broadly.

##### **Jacques Maritain**

The historical circumstances surrounding the compilation (out of lectures given in Spain in 1934) and the publication of "*True Humanism*" by Jacques Maritain in 1936 are complex and varied<sup>50</sup>. The 1930s were full of political and revolutionary ferment. After the fall of the monarchy and the establishment of the republic, Spain was already in the throes of the latent conflict that will flare up in the Civil War. In 1933, Pope Pius XI, renewing with his condemnations of communism, had issued an encyclical denouncing the spoliations and exactions that the new republican regime, with its base of communist and anarchist supporters, was visiting upon the Spanish Church. In 1926, the same pope had also condemned the Action Française and Charles Maurras (with whom Maritain had been on friendly terms after his conversion to Catholicism in 1906) on the basis that integral nationalism, its view of religion, and Catholicism in particular, in the service of this nationalism, as incompatible with the Catholic faith. These external historical events and the imperative to avoid what were perceived and condemned as extremes, combined with his own particular philosophical trajectory,

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<sup>50</sup> Jacques Maritain. *True Humanism*. Translation of *Humanisme Intégral* (1936). London: Geoffrey Bles 1938. For the historical circumstances, cf. Luc Perrin. *Le contexte d'Humanisme intégral*. *Revue des sciences religieuses* 81/3, 2007.

convinced Maritain to attempt to articulate the “*problems incident to a new realisation of Christendom*”.<sup>51</sup> Furthermore, because the world that came out of the Renaissance and the Reformation “*has since been torn by powerful and truly monstrous energies, where truth and error are strangely commingled and feed upon each other (...) It is the duty of those who love wisdom to seek to purify these unnatural and destructive energies, and to rescue the truths that they have so distorted*”.<sup>52</sup> Maritain’s aim in the book is twofold: first, it is to recover a particular truth that became confused with error in the period after the Renaissance and the Reformation (this corresponds to the first part of “*True Humanism*”), and to articulate the problems and the general principles of a putative new Christendom (dealt with in the second part of the book). His definition of humanism will form the basis of his later critique of the developments of the concept of humanism from the 16<sup>th</sup> century down to his own day. Humanism is what “*essentially tends to render man more truly human and to make his original greatness manifest by causing him to participate in all that can enrich him in nature and history. (...) It at once demands that man make use of all the potentialities he holds within him, his creative powers and the life of reason, and labours to make the powers of the physical world the instruments of his freedom*”.<sup>53</sup> Maritain himself recognised that his definition was capable of divergent interpretations. But this divergence precisely comes from the fact that the truths contained in this definition have been mixed with errors. These truths need to be “*purified*” and represented in order to address the challenges that come from systems of thought that still rely upon the admixture and to articulate the pattern for a new Christendom. This leads Maritain to look for the origins of the corruption or admixture of truth and errors in the immediate history of the Western world, starting with the Renaissance and the Reformation. These origins can be located in the reaction and opposition to the answers to the questions regarding man’s being, his relation to God and to his destiny given in the mediaeval (mostly, Augustinian and Thomistic) synthesis of Christian revelation and Greek wisdom. This synthesis reflected a keen awareness of man as being at once a natural and a supernatural being, endowed with personhood. The whole life of the human being was seen in the context of the fulfilment of his nature according to the dispensations of nature and of revelation. The self-awareness of the human creature was mediated through an awareness of his place in the order of the universe, and of his obligations and duties, natural and supernatural. However, the dissolution of the mediaeval order, and the heroic humanism that defined it, was signalled by the despair

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<sup>51</sup> Maritain, op.cit., p.vii.

<sup>52</sup> Maritain, op.cit., pp.viii-ix.

<sup>53</sup> Maritain, ibid., p.xii.

occasioned by the Great Plague (expressed in the late mediaeval “*Dance of Death*” motif in art and poetry), together with the political and religious troubles of the 15<sup>th</sup> century. The certainty about man’s place in the world order was shaken both by these events and by the advances in the sciences and in navigation. Man abandoned himself to “*the subjective resources of his greatness or the subjective determinism of his misery*” both of which form the respective core of the Renaissance and of the Reformation. For the later, it is no more the world and society that furnish the stable ground of man’s relationship with God; instead, it is his despair in front of the spectacle of his own utter depravity and inability to obey the divine law that determines his self-perception. On the other hand, what with the suppression of free will, man’s response to God’s grace is entirely predestined, either to salvation or to damnation. The Renaissance’s insistence on the intrinsic dignity of man will lead to the notion of natural goodness and of the supremacy of reason. Man, being a naturally good and rational animal, surveys the mechanical structure of the world and holds his destiny in his own hand. The theology of the Reformation is that of “*grace without freedom*” while that of Renaissance humanism is that of “*freedom without grace*”.<sup>54</sup> Maritain, thus, distinguishes between two kinds of humanism: one that is theocentric, which only an outspoken Christian humanism can be, and another that is anthropocentric, which came out of the dialectic between the Reformation and the Renaissance. This anthropocentric humanism is premised upon a naturalistic understanding of human nature and of human freedom.

From the inception of anthropocentric humanism, Maritain postulates a history of Western culture that is comprised of three phases or moments. The first phase is that of Christian naturalism, where it was expected that a purely rational human order, still conceived in a Christian style, would replace the decayed mediaeval world. This is the phase of man’s supremacy over nature and over the world. In the second phase, the purely natural human order that is being articulated demands and obtains its emancipation from the Christian style, which had remained as a mere ornament of the real mechanistic structure of a world constantly being discovered. It is accompanied by the extension of man’s imperialism over natural forces. Maritain calls this phase “*the moment of rationalist optimism, the bourgeois hour of our culture*.”<sup>55</sup> The third phase is that of revolutionary and atheist materialism that seeks to overturn all traditional values and establish a new humanity. The death of God is announced by the technical mastery of man, to which, he readily subordinates himself and society.

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<sup>54</sup> Maritain, op.cit., p.12.

<sup>55</sup> Maritain, ibid., p.23.

Against this deployment of atheist technicity upon society and civilisation, Maritain opposes two Christian positions, one Barthian, the other Thomist. He rejects the Barthian position as it is a recasting of the classical reformed tropes about the utter depravity of man, the rejection of all philosophy and the promotion of grace that is exclusive of human freedom. This position also includes the rejection of the Catholic understanding of the Church, which is dismissed as being too human. The other position, adopted and adapted by Maritain himself, was the Thomist, “*integralist*” or even “*progressive one*”. Its avowed aim, as he understands it, is to rescue and reclaim humanism from anthropocentrism, and to operate a renewal of society and culture. It is under the aegis of the Church that this renewal is to happen. But this proposition opens a new set of problems or questions about the right relation between the spiritual and the temporal, religion and civilisation, religion and politics, the Church and the state, and between the Church and the Kingdom of God itself.

Against the ancient pagan positions, Christianity posits the transcendence of religion, as belonging to the supernatural order: “*it is not part of man, nor of the world, nor of a race, nor of a culture, nor of civilisation, - it belongs to the inner life of God*”.<sup>56</sup> While man, and the rest, can be a part of it, the temporal and supernatural orders can never be merged, for their not formally identical. The natural order is concerned with man’s earthly life, while the supernatural order is concerned with his eternal life. However, while the two orders are distinct, the Christian view, in the Thomist sense, is that the natural must have reference and be subordinate to the supernatural order. The infinite superiority of the supernatural order does not mean that the natural order, in being made subordinate to it, should lose its natural specificity of object and end; rather, the end of the natural order it itself raised to a higher plane. A theocentric perspective, in placing man and the natural order in their rightful places, does not diminish or still less negate their dignity, but raises it.

The distinction and the subordination of the natural to the supernatural order ultimately places the problematic of the relations between the orders in the eschatological perspective of the expectation of the Kingdom of God. It is at this point that Maritain enters into an explicit discussion about political theology. He starts out by making a distinction between the meaning of the German term “*politische theologie*” and the French term “*théologie politique*”. This latter terms expresses, for Maritain, the fact that politics, in as much as it bears and engages with moral and spiritual values, falls within the purview of theological enquiry: “*Thus, there*

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<sup>56</sup> Maritain, op.cit., p.90.

*is a theology as there is a philosophy of politics, a science whose object is secular and temporal, and which judges and knows that object in the light of revealed principles*".<sup>57</sup> "Politische theologie", on the other hand, would see the political, inherently secular and temporal, as in reality, itself holy or sacred. In this vein, he describes Schmitt (whose connection with the Nazi regime is mentioned) as having tried to show the transposition of essentially theological themes in the major political and juridical ideas of modern times<sup>58</sup>. Maritain argued that such attempts could lead to the idea that political realities belong to the supernatural order; in other words, from a purely speculative perspective, it could lead to the confusion of orders. He regarded this definition of political theology as being intricately connected with the apology of a new German *sacrum imperium*, which is subtly linked to the rise of the Nazi party to power. In this respect, he also mentions Peterson's contributions to the question of the relation between the Church and the Kingdom of God, as dissenting from the prevalent apology of the then new regime in Germany.

Maritain identifies three errors with regard to the question of the Kingdom of God in relation to the distinction of the orders. Satanocracy, the first error, consists in regarding the whole world and, therefore, the earthly city, as being hopelessly evil, to be equated with the Kingdom of Satan. This error finds an echo in the extreme Protestant belief that the world and humanity are not saved together. Rather, the world, the natural order is left to Satan while men, namely, the elect, are aggregated to the supernatural order. It also find an echo in Catholic naturalism or rationalism whereby the orders are not only sharply distinguished but also held to be separate in a way such that nature and grace do not interact. Nature is left to its own devices, powerless in the face of temptation. This error goes against the basic Christian belief in Christ as the Saviour of the world. The second type of error, the theophanic or theocratic which consists in the insistence upon the more or less substantial manifestation of the Kingdom of God in the present time, cotemporal, if not consubstantial with the mass of a Christianised society, or in a particular church, to the exclusion of others. According to Maritain, even though there were instances where mediaeval Western Christendom tended to accept this error, the distinction of orders was always vindicated and taught. Another form, a utopian one, of this error is the belief or at least the expectation of the realisation of the Kingdom of God in the earthly city itself. The claim of a *potestas directa in temporalibus* on behalf of the papacy, the nationalisation of churches (e.g. in Gallicanism, in Protestant Erastianism, etc.) and Hegelianism (including its

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<sup>57</sup> Maritain, *ibid.*, p.92.

<sup>58</sup> Maritain, *op.cit.*, p.92.

Marxist emanations) are also manifestations of this error. The third error proceeds from the premises of atheism: God does not exist, therefore, man's salvation, or progress towards happiness, is in his own hands, and the earthly becomes the exclusive space in which this happiness is to be sought. The distinction of orders disappears simply because the existence or legitimacy of the supernatural order is denied. Maritain finds an instance of this in the system of Comte in which everything in history tends towards the realisation of the kingdom of pure humanity on earth, ridden of priestcraft and superstition. The error, however, is not necessarily expressed in terms of rejection and denial of the supernatural. It can take the subtler form of indifference and theological relativism.

It is important, in order not to fall into these errors, to recognise the deep ambiguities that mark any consideration of the relation between the orders. First, there is the cosmological dimension whereby each order is viewed in and of itself as it is in its nature, with its internal arrangements and proper ends. Then, there is the historical dimension which is connected to the eschatological – the orders in relation to sacred history, to the Christian dogma of salvation through Christ, and the constant fight against the Devil. It is, after all, the dialectic of the two cities. The reasons for the failure of Christendom can be seen from three perspectives: that of the extreme dualism of the modern age, whereby the orders are seen in strict opposition to one another. There is also the danger of the naturalisation of Christianity whereby, in a Christianised society, it is reduced to an instrument in the pursuit of purely human goals. Finally, Maritain also ascribed the failure to a lack of an authentically Christian philosophy that could operate a synthesis of the various lessons gleaned from the past about the interaction of the two orders.

After this impressive schematisation of the history of the relation between the two orders, together with the register of errors to be avoided, Maritain proceeds to articulate his vision of the ideal of the new Christendom. This vision implies a "*secular Christian*" conception of the temporal order. That is, the temporal order will not be sacralised nor consecrated; in this, it will constitute a sort of reverse image of the *sacrum imperium*. Such a secular Christian order will be opposed to all the errors of the previous phases of historical humanism. It will be the guiding principle of this renewed humanism, its theocentric core, will not be founded on any idea of "*God's holy empire over all things, but rather that of the holy freedom of the creature whom grace unites to God*".<sup>59</sup> Whereas Christendom in the middle ages ever aspired to unity

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<sup>59</sup> Maritain, op.cit., p.156.

and floundered upon the schism between church and state, the new Christendom will be a space of pluralism: the secular Christian perspective, itself, being inherent a pluralist one. This pluralism implies that the secular Christian perspective is also one of the autonomy of the temporal, expressed in a “*Christianly constituted lay state*”.<sup>60</sup> While this lay state will be subordinate to the supernatural ends, and, therefore, to the Church, it will not be so, as in the Middle Ages, in the capacity of an instrumental agent, but as a principal agent on an inferior plane. It is as such that it fulfils the duty of assisting the Church in propagating the Gospel, that is, not in the explicit pursuit of a supernatural end, but in the regular pursuit of its own proper earthly ends. The freedom of the human person will also be a central consideration of this lay state. Freedom here must not be understood in either only as freedom of choice, or as the freedom of the person as part of the state. Rather, it is “*the autonomous freedom of the person, which is at one with his spiritual perfection*”,<sup>61</sup> which must rank higher than the state itself in the order of the political and temporal world. Thus, the autonomy and the inviolability of the consciences of persons will be scrupulously respected and protected. In this way, the pluralism can enlarge to accommodate a wide array of beliefs and commitments, which must still, however, be united for the common good. Hence, if, following upon this, it possible that this lay state will have both Christian and non-Christian citizens, including unbelievers, how, then, are they to be integrated in the life of the earthly city? The notion of the pursuit of the common good must be refined. It will be neither by seeking a common doctrinal minimum or a theoretic common minimum; rather it is by seeking to arrive at a common practical task that the integration of people with different beliefs will be effectuated. Maritain wants to find in this quest for the common practical task the fulfilment of evangelical commandment to love one’s neighbour, whoever he may be.

### **Charles Journet**

The great Swiss theologian, Charles Journet (1891-1975) has left a work on theology, and ecclesiology in particular, that is remarkable in its fresh expression of doctrinal continuity with the Catholic Church, in the light of the teachings of Augustine and Aquinas. He was also a friend of Maritain with whom he shared a number of views, and with whom he sustained an extensive correspondence.

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<sup>60</sup> Maritain, op.cit., p.170-171.

<sup>61</sup> Maritain, op.cit., p.172.



Journet, like Maritain, was also preoccupied with the question of a Christian politics, and of the right relation between the religious and political orders, in an age where the Christian faith was openly challenged by totalitarian ideologies such as Communism and Nazism, and tacitly so, by a vestigially anticlerical liberalism. Journet does not pose the question of political theology directly as such, that is, by explicitly using the term “*political theology*”. Instead, he asks whether one could speak of a divine politics<sup>62</sup>. Divine politics can be taken to mean the government of the city by God. But what is the city that is governed by God? Journet answers that God governs his Church, which is his kingdom in formation here on earth, by a special providence. The temporal cities are governed by him through a common providence, which is subordinate to the first, the special providence. This subordination of the common providence to the special providence can itself receive different forms. The diversity of the ways in which divine providence acts upon polities proceeds from the inner complexity of the polities themselves as social organisms. Within God, himself, however, it is from a single divine act that the multiplicity of things, including the different forms of polities, are created. In the light of the distinction between the special and common types of providence, there emerges a tripartite understanding of politics.

First, there is what Journet calls properly “*divine politics*”.<sup>63</sup> Divine politics is first revealed in the scriptures as the intervention of God in the history of one people, whom he has chosen to be the vessel and the instrument for the coming of his own kingdom. Historically, then, the promise of this new divine kingdom occurs in a particular geo-political context of the empires and kingdoms of the Eastern Mediterranean region and of Mesopotamia. It is to be a kingdom of justice that appears not through violence, but by an effect of divine grace. It will also signal the end or the limits of the power of temporal kingdoms, in that these will not be able to prevail against it, and that, in the eschatological horizon of the fullness of this kingdom, at the Last Judgement, they will simply cease to exist. For the history of divine politics is strictly that of the city of God, of the Church in its eschatological fullness. Therefore, it cannot be the history of the human attempts at instantiating what was believed to be divine rule, for that which was thereby established was not the city of God. Such instantiations were limited by particular temporal and geographic circumstances, which the Church, by virtue of its universality, necessarily transcends.

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<sup>62</sup> Charles Journet. *Exigences chrétiennes en politique*. Chapter 14: *Politique divine ou politique chrétienne ?* in *Œuvres Complètes de Charles Journet* vol.IX Saint-Maurice, Switzerland: Editions Saint Augustin 2007, pp.664-688. Cf. in the same volume, *La Doctrine de la Cité selon Saint Thomas d’Aquin*, pp.451-465.

<sup>63</sup> Journet, op.cit., p.665.

The second type of politics emerged when most of Europe became Christian. First, the Roman Empire itself adopted the Christian religion, and when it disappeared, the kingdoms that came to fill in the void, not only adopted the Christian religion but also organised themselves as Christian political entities. In this articulation of a European political system, whether internationally or nationally, the distinction between the temporal and the spiritual, together with the idea of the necessity of the subordination of the former to the latter, was often blurred. For Journet, Christianity as a spiritual entity is distinct from Christendom which is a historical and temporal entity: the pope was the head of the first, while the Emperor was the theoretical head of the second. What, then, led the popes not only to claim a power superior to that of the emperors, but also to exercise it with all that it implies of the use of force and coercion. Journet argues that popes were motivated to the exercise of such power only when it was clear that emperors (and other rulers) were not fully seized of their duties with respect to the Church (For example, in the case of Innocent III against King John, or Emperor Frederick II) and in the face of external dangers that threatened Christendom, such as an imminent Ottoman invasion<sup>64</sup>. In a sacral regime, heresy, understood not so much as a sin against the unity of faith as the subversion of the Christian constitution of the state, becomes a punishable civil offence. The question of coercion and conversion, and hence, of conscience, becomes a complex issue of truly theologico-political problems that will contribute decisively to erode the already fragile mediaeval unity. Journet is also insistent that it was not the assumption of regal powers that made the Church a kingdom. The temporal power of the papacy is only incidental to its true mission of leading souls to God. Thus, the history of sacral regimes, which is the history of Western Christendom, is that of men who seek to achieve the kingdom of God on earth but who constantly fail. The sacral model of Western Christendom ought not to serve as a model or pattern for future Christian political action; on the contrary, its study serves to warn people engaged in such an action about what must be avoided in the articulation of a new Christendom.

Christian politics, the third type of politics identified by Journet, is one that seeks to conduct the affairs of the earthly city in the light of the teaching of the Gospel. The aim of a polity governed in this way is to identify those political ends which are legitimate, and compatible with Christianity, and to orient the action of the state in the pursuit of those ends. Here both Journet and Maritain agree on the need for pluralism and for the respect of consciences and

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<sup>64</sup> Journet, *op.cit.*, p.673.

cautions about the dangers of what he terms “*dogmatic tolerance*” which relativises the value of all forms of belief and unbelief equally.<sup>65</sup>

On the subject of the non-sacral Christian city, Journet’s thought agrees much with Maritain’s articulation of the new Christendom. However, while for Maritain the philosopher, the perspective was that of the human agency in the making of that new Christendom, Journet, the theologian, stresses the action of divine providence and the role of the Church; hence, the distinction between the special and common types of providence mentioned above.

It is in the light of the historical acts of divine providence that the favours showered by God upon certain nations need to be understood. Effectively, Journet sketches here the contours of a sacred history, not just of Israel and of the Church, but of all peoples (or nations in the pre-revolutionary sense) who are receptive to the motions of providence and to some divine calling. The rise and decline of these peoples are intimately connected with their receptivity and their enactment of that divine calling or vocation<sup>66</sup>. The Church is possessed of its own self-identity as the bride and body of Christ. It is already covered by God’s own special providence, which is constantly present to its mind through the indwelling of the Holy Ghost. It is otherwise with the peoples or nations, who can either fall within the divine scheme of special or of common providence. It can happen that God will allow a particular nation to grow and flourish according to its own intrinsic laws in order for a particular cultural element to be perfected and incorporated into the Church. Journet gives plainchant and the technical linguistic expression of dogmatic formulations (or, its entire juridical genius, as Schmitt might argue) as examples of the elevation and aggregation of elements of Roman culture to the common patrimony of the Church. In that they contribute to the earthly advancement of the Church, the elevation and subordination of these elements of a national character transcend the natural ends of national societies, and thus, truly belong to sacred history. On the other hand, it belongs to the scheme of common providence that all nations should not only pursue their own natural ends as autonomous units, but that they should also seek to organise the temporal relations that bind them to other nations, and unite them to the rest of humanity<sup>67</sup>. If the Church itself is not the basis of the cultural and political unity of humankind, it is nevertheless within it, that human nature and culture are uniquely acknowledged, promoted, transformed and elevated.

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<sup>65</sup> Cf. Journet, op.cit., p.678.

<sup>66</sup> Cf. Journet, ibid., p.685.

<sup>67</sup> Cf. Journet, ibid.

A Christian politics must, therefore, be constantly mindful of the different ends of the two cities, of the inevitable pluralism of modern politics, without ceasing to devise new areas of common action. For both cities are ordained to some good. It must be possible, therefore, to find a “*community of similarity, or of proportion, in technical sense of the word, of analogy*” with respect to practical ends within the natural order.<sup>68</sup>

#### **D. The Present Task**

A number of theologico-political themes have emerged from the foregoing. The most immediate images that present themselves in the syntagma “*political theology*” are those of the simultaneous utterance of infinitude and finitude, of divinity and humanity, of transcendence and immanence, considered as formal relations embedded in historical circumstances. Until and unless the practitioners of political theology find most compelling reasons to discard the images of this juxtaposition as they have been received in the Western tradition broadly understood, in the Classical and Scholastic traditions in particular, these images and the broader tradition ought perhaps to be given the benefit of the doubt. One of the reasons to study Bonald is because precisely he puts a hermeneutic of faith at the heart of his philosophical system. This attitude of faith, loosely understood, with respect to tradition pertains not only to the ability to recognise a theologico-political code, to above all, to the conviction that the code itself belongs to a self-possessed public culture that is aware of its origins and of the stakes of political and institutional change relative to the identity and continuities of societies and cultures. In this sense, again, the value of Bonald’s system manifests itself in that it endeavours to give an account of all levels of society (domestic, political, religious) in themselves and among one another that is consistent with the tradition of this public culture.

Political theology thus understood is an exercise that is constantly informed by the demands of revelation, tradition, institutional science and public life. The Augustinian theme of the Two Cities unconceals the fundamental tensions that underlie those demands, while the Thomist theology of free will and law endeavour to effect a reconciliation. The dialectic of similarity and difference, of separation and distinction, of union and confusion, proceeding from the ambivalence of the field, nevertheless, strive towards the manifestation of the rationality of social and political arrangements. If analogy is essential for the attempt at the explanation of

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<sup>68</sup> Journet. *L’Eglise du Verbe Incarné: Essai de Théologie Spéculative*. Paris: Desclée de Brouwer 1943, pp.274-275.

the mystery of God himself, it is all the more necessary for the comprehension of the limits of the relationship with his creatures. Thus, analogy as the expression of the social relation between the Uncreated and the created lies at the centre of the broad theologico-political perspective of the current thesis. The images of the Two Cities, of the Two Swords, of Maritain's "*Christian-secular*" and of Journet's "*Christian politics*" already imply the social analogy. In Schmitt, the study of the juridical structure of political and theological sovereignty itself yields a sociology of analogical concepts. In Bonald, still, in spite of the deficiencies of some aspects of his philosophical system, the image of analogy is painted in bolder strokes. The violence of revolutionary fervour is still felt and the determination to prevent it from happening by sheer political and theoretical exertions ensure a depth of insight and intention almost unrivalled since. Perhaps, what political theology has missed so far has been an insight in the necessary social character of being as such: that being is given to us as social fact, as social being.



## Chapter 1

### Historical Circumstances

#### A. Note on the Life and Times of Louis de Bonald

The principal source of information about the life and times of Louis de Bonald is a notice written by one of his sons, Victor de Bonald, which was affixed to the editions of his works published after his death<sup>69</sup>. Bonald was born on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of October 1754, into an old family of the ancient province of Rouergue. Having lost his father at an early age, he was brought up by his mother until he was sent to Paris to study at the Oratorian college in Juilly. After his studies, Bonald enrolled in the famed company of musketeers until it was disbanded in 1776, after which he returned to his native province, married and assumed various magistracies and official functions, most notably, that of mayor of Milhau (he was elected in 1785), one of the principal towns of Rouergue.

Bonald won the approbation of the National Assembly when in the later part of the year 1789, in the face of increasing public disorder and rumours of the impending progress of marauding bands, he succeeded in setting up and organising the defence forces of his *département*. The words that he addressed to the municipal council of Milhau on that occasion were already pregnant with the concerns that he would further elaborate in his subsequent writings: he invited the other cities and communes of the region to “*unite more closely in a confederation of honour, of virtue, and of the respect of laws, in order to make infractions to public order cease and all such acts of violence that jeopardise the life and property of citizens*”.<sup>70</sup> In 1790, he was elected to the regional assembly and soon was chosen to be the president of the regional

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<sup>69</sup> The edition we used for the purposes of this chapter is that of the “*Œuvres de M. de Bonald*” published by Adrien Le Clere in Paris in 1854.

<sup>70</sup> “*De la Vie et des Écrits de M. le Vicomte de Bonald*” by Victor de Bonald, in vol.1 of *Œuvres de M. de Bonald*.

administration. It was in July of the same year that the National Assembly passed the *Civil Constitution of the Clergy*. The constitution was thought by most of the leading churchmen (including the Abbé Sieyès, the author of the famous pamphlet “*What is the Third Estate?*”) to subordinate the Church of France entirely to the state, leaving it with little liberty and resources. Louis XVI, in delaying to give his assent to the bill, tried to negotiate with the Pope Pius VI, who refused his approbation and ultimately condemned the constitution in early 1791. Bonald could not, in conscience, accept the constitution and, therefore, resigned as president of the departmental administration, professing his loyalty to the King while protesting the decisions of the National Assembly. His letter of resignation contained the expression of the most moving attachment to the Church and of his submission to her teachings.

After his resignation, Bonald retired to a strictly private and domestic existence. Soon after, however, he was induced to join the flow of the Emigration, and left France for Germany, where he settled in Heidelberg with his sons. It was there that he penned his first work, “*The Theory of Political and Religious Power*” in 1796. We are told by his son that Bonald never intended to embark upon a writing career: the precarious leisure afforded by emigration coupled with the desire to fight the ideas of the Revolution were the initial conditions in which he took up the pen. Bossuet’s *Discourse on Universal History*, the works of Tacitus, Montesquieu and Rousseau were his constant (and, because of the vagaries of exile, his only) reference and study, as evidenced by his repeated critical engagements with those authors, especially the latter two, all throughout his early works. “*The Theory of Political and Religious Power*” was published in Constance in 1796 but the copies sent to France were immediately seized on the orders of the Directory, with the result that the first diffusion of Bonald’s thought was severely restricted. The following year Bonald returned to France only to find that most of his properties, estates and houses had been sold, with the exception of an estate of little value. He decided to move to Paris, where he lived in seclusion, dedicating himself to study and writing. Bonaparte’s ascent to power ushered a period of relative stability and quiet in France that allowed émigrés to return.

The year 1800 saw the publication of the *Analytical Essay on the Natural Laws of Social Order* (*Essai analytique sur les lois naturelles de l’ordre social*), which Bonald himself describes as a condensed recapitulation of the main points advanced in his first work. The *Analytical Essay* was closely followed by the publication of the short monograph on divorce and of *Primitive Legislation* (*Législation primitive*) in 1802. The next major writing appeared in 1818, entitled *Philosophical Studies on the Primary Objects of the Moral Sciences* (*Recherches*



*philosophiques sur les premiers objets des connaissances morales*), which can be described as a philosophical summa of Bonald's thought, containing among other things a lengthy exposition of the doctrine of primitive revelation. Finally, the *Philosophical Demonstration of the Constitutive Principle of Society* (*Démonstration philosophique du principe constitutif de la société*) was published in 1830. *The main body of Bonaldian doctrine can be said to be contained in the writing mentioned in the foregoing lines.* While occasional reference will be made to his other works, the current studies intend to follow the arguments in those four works closely. Of these, the *Philosophical Demonstration* is seen as the definitive re-statement of Bonald's doctrine, and indeed, as his testament. Beside those major works, Bonald became thoroughly engaged in the literary and political life of France, publishing other shorter monographs, pamphlet and speeches. Alongside Chateaubriand and other eminent literary figures of the early decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, he wrote for the *Mercure de France*, and with others of the ultra-royalist party, later contributed articles to the *Conservateur*.

The collaboration with the *Mercure de France* started in the late 1790s when Bonald was invited to join the journal by Louis de Fontanes, who would later on become the grand master of the imperial University. It was also Fontanes who brought Bonald to the attention of Napoleon and his entourage, and who offered him a place on the Council of the imperial University. Bonald, by virtue of his royalist convictions, did not immediately accept; he only reluctantly did so two years later. It is possible that he, in more or less the same manner as Fontanes, saw the Napoleonic reforms as a necessary and providential preparatory stage before a fuller restoration of the state of France. Around the same time, he was invited by Louis Bonaparte, Napoleon's brother, and somewhat unwilling King of Holland, to become the tutor of his son. The letter that Louis Bonaparte sent to Bonald is full of expressions of admiration and praise for Bonald and his work. Louis Bonaparte writes that "*after having looked everywhere, I have thought, Sir, that, despite not knowing you personally, you were one of the men I esteem the most; it appeared to me that your principles were in agreement with my sentiments*".<sup>71</sup> Towards the end of the letter, he declares that should Bonald not accept his offer, he would still be honoured to have made his acquaintance. Louis's conduct as King in Holland seem to be quite consonant with the claim regarding the agreement of his sentiments with Bonald's principles: during his short reign, he tirelessly defended and promoted the interests of the Dutch people, not fearing to incur the wrath of his brother, Napoleon, for doing so, and

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<sup>71</sup> Victor de Bonald, op.cit. p.38-39.

ultimately, costing him his throne, and, also costing the Dutch people, a King who was concerned with the preservation of their nation.

In 1814, Bonald welcomed the restoration of the royal monarchy with the return of the Bourbon dynasty on the throne of France. Still, the enthusiasm of restoration was marred with the introduction of the Constitutional Charter. It seemed to Bonald that the Charter promoted that nefarious principle, which he had constantly fought in his writings, namely, the division of power. The former constitution, which upheld the unity of power, was now forgotten. In a letter to Maistre, he decried the “*madness that written constitutions were*”, seeing it as the triumph of an “*irreligious and impolitic philosophy*”. He was aghast at the intrusion of representative institutions, and other related features of liberal regimes, such as the freedom of the press, into the Charter, which thereby lost the character of a genuine programme of restoration of the ancient institutions of France. Even Napoleon had resisted such intrusions. Nonetheless, Bonald submitted to the new regime, in dutiful obedience to the King, thus illustrating in his own life what he had always advocated.

Bonald was nominated to the Chamber of Deputies and took an active part in the work of this assembly early on. His first target was divorce, and it is largely thanks to his efforts, through his speeches in the Chamber and in his writings, that the statute allowing divorce was repealed. The next subject on which Bonald was to devote his energies was that of the properties that had been confiscated under the Revolution and had become public property. Bonald pressed for the restitution of some of the properties thus taken, in particular to the Church. He considered the expropriation and despoliation of Church lands to be a grave sacrilege which demanded reparation. He felt it would have been fitting that the inaugural act of the restored dynasty should have been the restitution of the county of Avignon to the papacy. Bonald felt that Louis XVIII was too lethargic in dealing with such problems, and too reluctant to implement measures that would have led to an authentic restoration along purely royalist lines: “*constitutional kings*”, he opined, “*are prone to fall asleep in the arms of their ministries, laying the burden of their own responsibility upon these. They forget that they are but ministers themselves, responsible to that King of kings who did not intend to give them the sword in vain*”.<sup>72</sup> With the promulgation of the Charter and the maintenance of the Napoleonic institutions such as the legal codes and the administrative structures, Bonald felt that too much of the revolutionary and Bonapartist past were allowed to intrude into what he deemed to be a

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<sup>72</sup> Bonald, op.cit., p.50.

new, regenerative era for France. He also felt that the deliberative element hindered rather than helped the government to follow coherent lines of policy and implement them. He decried the interminable debates and the turbulent atmosphere that reign in political assemblies: men should only be suffered to be assembled in the military camp and the church, for there, at least, they listen and obey.

Yet, if he was not successful in preventing what he saw to be the worst excesses of parliamentarism to infect the work of the Restoration, he received official recognition for his work and for his attachment to the dynasty. He was elected in 1816 to the Académie Française to replace Cambacérès, who had been excluded by royal decree on account of his revolutionary activities.<sup>73</sup> Bonald was made a minister of state in 1822 and the following year he was elevated to the peerage. At the request of Charles X, he presided over the committee on the censorship of the press, and oversaw the preparation and implementation of new regulations to that effect. The 8<sup>th</sup> article of the Constitutional Charter had provided for such freedom of the press as was compatible with the laws of the realm. The struggle between the ultra-royalists and the liberals were not confined to the debates of the Chamber of Deputies; it soon spilt onto the arena of public opinion, and initiated such movements of political activism that threatened the stability of the ministries under the restored kings. It is under circumstances that Bonald was called upon to preside over the committee of censorship. In the context of the reconstruction and regeneration of France that was at the heart of the Restoration, the ultra-royalists, even though they themselves made use of the press, were for the censorship of a public opinion, whose volatility could endanger the stability sought by them. Bonald's work for the committee consummated the rift between himself and Chateaubriand who advocated an unlimited freedom for the press. It also brought to light the fundamental difference between the two men, not only in terms of temperament, taste and style, but also, in their respective approaches to the French Revolution, and their understanding of what the Restoration should consist. In 1830, the Bourbon dynasty fell, and their Orléans cousins replaced them on the throne. But it was a much changed throne – the new dynasty professed greater belief in constitutional monarchy and pledged to reinforce the Charter. The new monarch, Louis-Philippe, styled himself "*King of the French*" to underline the popular aspect of the new regime.

Bonald had left Paris shortly before the July Revolution; he refused to swear allegiance to the new regime, and was deprived of his peerage. He spent the last ten years of his life in his lands

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<sup>73</sup> Cambacérès was also one of the architects of the Napoleonic legal and administrative reforms.

near Milhau. When he left Paris, he also left public life, and settled himself in a rustic retreat, where he continued his studies and meditations. We learn from his son's account that Bonald preserved all his mental and physical faculties to the end, which occurred on the 24<sup>th</sup> of November 1840, when he was 86 years old.

## **B. The Context of Bonaldian Thought**

### **i. Introduction**

As seen above, Bonald's intellectual career did not start until the French Revolution. It is in reaction to it that he felt called to articulate the philosophical basis of his political beliefs. He can thus, and indeed, conventionally, has been, ranked among the authors of the counter-revolutionary movement. This, however, hardly helps us to situate Bonald with any greater precision in the history of political thought, especially, if the significant variety of views and commitments within the counter-revolutionary movement itself are taken into account.

Thus, Jacques Godechot<sup>74</sup> tries to trace the variety of counter-revolutionary thought to three ideological currents that were present in French conservative thought from the late 17<sup>th</sup> century onwards: historical conservatism, enlightened despotism, and integral absolutism. No single author of the counter-revolution appears to have carried over one of these currents to the exclusion of the others in his writings. Instead, it would seem that these currents were all present, in varying degrees of affirmation and negation, in thinkers ranging from the more liberal Mallet du Pan to Bonald.

Antoine Compagnon<sup>75</sup> would rather see the counter-revolution as the political and historical enactment of the more comprehensive antimodernist movement, expressed philosophically by adherence to the Counter-Enlightenment, and theologically in an attachment to varying shades of Augustinism. For Compagnon, then, the concept of antimodernism is a richer one than the counter-revolution, in the sense precisely that it encompasses the counter-revolution, and

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<sup>74</sup> Jacques Godechot. *La Contre-Revolution: Doctrine et Action, 1789-1804*. (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1961).

<sup>75</sup> Antoine Compagnon. *Les antimodernes: de Joseph de Maistre à Roland Barthes*. (Paris: NRF, Editions Gallimard, 2005).

eschews the engagement in an irresolvable dialectic relation with the Revolution. Bonald did not shrink from direct dialectical engagement with revolutionary ideas; instead, he laid out as clearly and systematically as possible the fundamental principles of political and religious society, striving to show their necessary character, over and against the revolutionary worldview. The antimodern attitude would reject this sort of dialectical engagement, and, in rejecting modernity, would seek to fight it, irrespective of the shape or form it would take. The antimodernism at the heart of Bonald's counter-revolutionary thought is undeniable – it is, admittedly, an antimodernism that is rooted in the reaction against a situation that can only be described as a paroxysm of modernity. That such a reaction is based upon “modernity” itself pertains to the inevitable historical character of all human thinking and acting; the dependence is here at once historical and logical. For, from a reactionary point of view, the reaction is itself but a reminder of truths held to be perennial, that have always been available to humans, and that will continue to be preserved. Bonald was reacting against what he perceived to be the erosion of the sense of society understood in a strictly hierarchical way. It was, therefore, incumbent upon himself, in the face of such erosion, to restate the principles of social life and organisation. Reaction is understood as a positive intellectual and political engagement – the enunciation of principles with a view to the conservation, if not restoration of traditional social structures. Conservation requires human agency, and thus, engagement of some kind. As seen in the preceding section, it could not be held against Bonald that he fell short of the ancient maxim accordingly to which one should live first and then philosophise. René Rémond, in his historical survey of French right-wing politics, acknowledges that Bonald, at least throughout the Restoration was occupied both with “*political reflection*” and “*parliamentary practice*”.<sup>76</sup>

Antimodernism, on its own, however, is too indefinite and, therefore, too unhelpful a term to be retained in this attempt at giving an account of Bonald's thought. It is ultimately derived from the principles that animate the whole of Bonald's counter-revolutionary engagement, namely, those of the conservatism and traditionalism of Bonald, and it is those principles that will be sketched. This quest for principles falls in line with the essential character of the Counter-Revolution: the survey of history, of the past in search of universal principles, which particular forms of government and regimes only instantiate in varying degrees, coupled with the judgment of the present on the basis of those principles. The ways in which Bonald articulated the principles of conservatism ultimately depend upon the history of the

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<sup>76</sup> René Rémond. *Les droites en France*. (Paris: Editions Aubier, 1982). Cf. The second chapter, p.53.

conservative ideal in Europe and its reception and interpretation. Already for some of the foremost critics and men of letters of the nineteenth century, namely Sainte-Beuve<sup>77</sup> and Faguet<sup>78</sup>, the concerns voiced by Bonald in his work seemed rather distant and foreign. The social reorganisation that accompanied the progress of the Revolution, reaching its climax and consummation in the Napoleonic legislation and codification, was arguably by then firmly established; even among the more unbending of conservatives there was no desire to repeal them and restore the previous order.

Bonald's attempt at the formalisation of the structures and institutions of the *Ancien Régime*, unadorned by the then fashionable and Romantic appeal to sentiment, imagination and the senses, found little sympathy among his contemporaries and subsequent generations. His first published work, the treatise on the theory of political and religious power, famously likened by Chateaubriand to the pyramids of Egypt, those "*palaces of death*",<sup>79</sup> was perceived to embody the ultimate effort to articulate the values of the old order, and, therefore, was deemed to belong to the comparative history of ideas rather than to the truly epoch making political theorising, say, of a Rousseau, or even, of a Constant. The negative aesthetic judgement, oft repeated, upon the laconic simplicity of his style, delivered in the age of Romanticism, facilitated the marginalisation and rejection of the content of his system. It was not only that the content of his system was politically antagonistic to the liberal ideology that was at once the ground of the ideas of the French Revolution and the driving force for the subsequent propagation of the same ideas in less revolutionary form in following eras. The antagonism between the two can be said to be of theological and cosmological (in the sense of a reasoned worldview) significance. Bonald's system reposes upon theism, and emphatically not upon deism, to which most of the revolutionaries, their Enlightenment forefathers and their liberal grandchildren rendered some form of worship. The theism of Bonald, his conviction that God, while being over and above history, still acts and intervenes in and through it, is what principally distinguishes him from most critics of the French Revolution, with the probable exception of Joseph de Maistre and of their respective collaborators and disciples. Conservatism for Bonald is not a question of the preservation of any order, but it is rather a

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<sup>77</sup> Charles Augustin Sainte-Beuve. *Causeries du Lundi*. (Paris: Garnier Frères, 1857) Volume IV, p.427-449.

<sup>78</sup> Emile Faguet. *Politiques et moralistes du XIXe siècle*. (Paris: 1891), pp.69-121.

<sup>79</sup> "Dans la Théorie du pouvoir civil et religieux de M de Bonald, il y a eu du génie mais c'est une chose qui fait peine de reconnoître combien les idées de cette théorie sont déjà loin de nous. Avec quelle rapidité le temps nous entraîne. L'ouvrage de M de Bonald est comme ces pyramides, palais de la mort qui ne servent au navigateur sur le Nil qu'à mesurer le chemin qu'il a fait avec les flots." François-René de Chateaubriand. Preface to the *Essai sur les Révolutions* in *Œuvres* (Paris: Charles Hingray, Éditeur, 1838), p.270.

matter of duty, an imperative to preserve the right order, delivered to Man by acts of divine revelation. Bonald's opposition to the constitutional settlement of the Restoration and his attempt at resistance from within follow upon this very conception of order, whose exposition, illustration and defence furnished the major and most recurring themes of his literary career.

## **ii. The Counter-Revolution**

As mentioned in the foregoing section, the Counter-Revolution was never a single doctrinally or practically uniform movement. For example, some of its earliest exponents, Rivarol, Mallet du Pan, and even, Burke, for example, all articulated their opposition to revolutionary ideals based on grounds that did not depend on Tradition or Authority in the fundamental and external, coercive and definitive sense that the Theocrats would assume. Burke, after all, was a defender of the Revolution of 1688 and of the constitutional settlement that it produced, and used the contrast between 1688 and 1789, to build his argument against the ideas of 1789 and all the subsequent changes that followed it. The traditionalism of Burke is not one that is based on abstract principles of what society should be, or even what society is in essence, but rather on the experience and evolution of society. There is here an opposition between metaphysics, between the contemplation of what is, and history, the temporal unfolding of human experience, and Burkean traditionalism is solidly rooted in the latter.

Godechot<sup>80</sup> finds the same opposition in the thought of Rivarol who maintained that philosophy and politics are two different sciences that must remain separate. Rivarol opposed the French Revolution on aesthetic, linguistic and historical grounds; the Revolution both as a popular and bourgeois movement, fraught with all the associated violence and crudeness, was contrasted sharply with the sweetness of life and refinement of manners of the pre-Revolutionary period, of which, his *Dissertation sur l'universalité de la langue française* (1784) furnished a subtle defence. The Revolutionary ideology was one according to which politics sought to control such aspects of human life and experience with which even the Bourbons, at the height of their absolutist frenzy, imagined or real, would never have dreamt of meddling. Rivarol was not against reforms as such, but he was certainly not for the type of upheaval brought about by the confusion of disciplines and domains that characterised the French Revolution. Instead, it would seem that he was in favour of enlightened despotism such as Voltaire himself

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<sup>80</sup> Godechot, op.cit., p.37-39.

propounded; an enlightened despotism that would be the great architect of social and political reforms introduced gradually to improve the lot of hitherto backward populations.

Neither was the exiled Genevese publicist Mallet du Pan initially against the reforms, even those brought in at the earliest stages of the National Constituent Assembly. Mallet du Pan was resigned to the fact that in the inevitable course of history changes occur, and that the right attitude under such circumstances was to make the best of the changes. His advocacy, as much in his writings as in his active lobbying, was towards the moderation of the revolutionary movement and the urgent necessity to address the more nefarious aspects of public administration, namely the unequal fiscal regime, under the Ancien Régime.

*He shared with Burke (and, not unsurprisingly, with most writers of the Counter-Revolution) a profound scepticism as regards the Declaration of Rights of 1789. Burke's scepticism was based upon his understanding of the Declaration as an enunciation of abstract and metaphysical claims that had no bearing on human experience whereas for Mallet, the opposition to the Declaration is couched in terms of whether it had any chance of being applied at all or remain a dead letter. If applied, he foresaw the Declaration would have catastrophic consequences for French society. In the celebrated journal, the Mercure de France (to which Bonald would later contribute), he published a detailed critique of the Declaration that subsequently would gain a wide currency in Émigré circles. The framers of the Declaration, he contended, should have contented themselves with giving statutory expression to the Golden Rule: "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you", which, for him, is the summary of all human rights. Yet, Mallet is very much distrustful of the implicit concept of statutory instruments that underlies the Declaration: doctrines and principles should inspire laws, but not be made into laws. Unlike most writers of the counter-revolutionary school, whether conservatives or theocratic, Mallet held that the Enlightenment, and by extension, the Philosophes were not to be blamed for the course and spread of the French Revolution and its ideas: it was not, for him, a matter of "la faute à Voltaire, la faute à Rousseau". Unlike Burke and the others, he refused to subscribe to any deterministic explanation of the causes of the Revolution, whether it be the influence of the Philosophes, the decline of moral and religious sentiment, or the irresponsibility of those in power. He accepted the ends of the principles of 1789 but rejected the means that came to be used in their furtherance, and which, to a degree, had become undistinguishable from them. On the other hand, like Maistre and Bonald, he recognised the providential character of the period, and deplored the humiliation of the Catholic Church and the persecution of her ministers. Thus, in more ways than one, he furnishes the*



example of a Counter-Revolutionary who disagreed significantly with them on the grounds of doctrine and policy, and helps, from the outset put the basic principles of the theocratic school (of the Counter-Revolution) in sharper relief.

On the other hand, while Maistre did write to Bonald that “*I have thought nothing that you have not written, and I have not written anything that you have not thought*”,<sup>81</sup> significant differences between the two emerge upon a closer comparison of their respective ideas, showing that even the theocratic school of the Counter-Revolution is not one block of doctrinal uniformity. While they both formulated their opposition to the principles of the French Revolution from the vantage point of tradition and, in a way, of theology, they held crucially different conceptions of the same. Bonald’s understanding was more universal, based on the idea that human beings are everywhere the same and that one model should suffice for all of them. Maistre, on the other hand, believed that where the Revolution most signally failed was precisely in putting forth an a priori constitution and expecting that all human beings, irrespective of clime and condition, would conform to it. In other words, the universalism of Bonald is to be contrasted with the historicism of Maistre in their respective understanding of tradition, politics and theology are interconnected. Maistre’s admiration for the unwritten and conventional character of the English constitution, which is itself an echo of the influence of Montesquieu, finds little sympathy in Bonald. Based upon investigations into epistemology and the theory of the mind, the Bonaldian theory of the primitive revelation has no counterpart whatsoever in Maistre’s system, which seems happy to relay the classic and traditional understanding of the Platonic theory of innate ideas. The Bonaldian theory, as will be seen later, postulates a complex synergy of God, Man and Society to account for language and for the transmission of the content of the primitive revelation. More explicitly than Maistre, Bonald readily engages in the appraisal and criticism of the philosophy of his day, and of the preceding centuries: his *Recherches Philosophiques* represents a serious engagement and confrontation with post-Cartesian, Malebranchian and Enlightenment philosophy.

The theocratic phase of Counter-Revolutionary thought inaugurated by Bonald and Maistre does recapitulate in itself the extrinsic critique of the formal aspects of the French Revolution formulated by Burke and Mallet du Pan from the perspective of what could be termed traditionalist liberalism, or simply, conservatism. What it emphatically does not share with traditionalist liberalism is the evolutive understanding of history that builds upon the successive

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<sup>81</sup> Quoted by Bonald, in a footnote to the eighteenth chapter of the *Démonstration Philosophique* on Sacrifice.

events of the pass, accepting them as long as they do not effect any fundamental change. This is the perspective from which Burke could accept the so-called Glorious Revolution, and Mallet du Pan, the Genevese Revolutions of the latter half of the 18th century. Such a concept of history would seem to be too devoid of a proper axiology and, ultimately, of ethical content to be fully accepted by the theocrats. Ultimately, history cannot pass judgment upon itself; this is the task of reason as an organ of tradition and society. In moments of great crisis, Reason can only re-assert itself on the course of events in a providential manner. This is why both Maistre and Bonald entertained great hopes of the Restauration of the Bourbon monarchy after the fall of Napoleon.

Godechot in the section of his book dealing with Bonald repeats the commonplace according to which Maistre is the better writer, more witty and brilliant than Bonald, whom he dismisses as a romantic, who had lost all touch with reality<sup>82</sup>. The latter charge, unless it were meant flippantly, is somewhat challenged by Copleston<sup>83</sup> who shows clearly the difference between Bonald and the second generation of Counter-Revolutionary thinkers, some of whom would become the spearheads of the Romantic movement, most notably, Chateaubriand. While the rational character of the arguments of Bonald and of Maistre could be challenged from the point of view of the current philosophical standards of rationality, the fact that they expressed those arguments in a logically coherent way, showing the necessary connections of propositions, especially, in Bonald's case, cannot be questioned. It is not to emotion and sentiment, it is not to the senses and feelings, that Bonald appeals to in order to articulate his theory of society, of primitive revelation, and indeed, to build his political theology, even though he did not call it that. His appeal to history, to the Ancien Régime, is never one of sentimental attachment or nostalgia, even where that would have been legitimate, but it is always one of illustration of his understanding of how government should, and actually, in reality, does function. Political romanticism has no place in Bonald's system, and cannot be used to describe any aspect of his thought. For Bonald, the truth of the Catholic faith, and of the Ancien Régime is not a matter of aesthetics; he does not need to survey the ruins of the basilica of Saint Denis to perceive and know the many virtues of that faith, and the power of that regime. Bonald himself did not make a virtue of irrationality, striving to adhere constantly to certain standards of rationality; if a faithful picture of his intentions in the appraisal of his work is to be made at all, his commitment to rationality must be taken seriously. In the same

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<sup>82</sup> Godechot, op.cit., p.111.

<sup>83</sup> Frederick Copleston. *A History of Philosophy. Vol.IX. Maine de Biran to Sartre* (London: Search Press, 1975), pp.9-10.

manner, and in the same section, Godechot used “metaphysical” as a term of disparagement when comparing the works of Bonald with those of Maistre. To use the word “*metaphysical*” in such a way betokens certain philosophical, and even, ideological commitments<sup>84</sup>, to the extent, that, what enhances the value of Bonald’s work in our eyes is precisely its metaphysical character. The positivity (and, indeed, creativity) of his response to the French Revolution precisely lies in the metaphysical account of sociality, and in the theological grounds of that account, which, together with a unique epistemology and theory of revelation, forms the heart of his system. This metaphysical and theological positivity is certainly the least transient aspect of Bonald’s thought, and it did throughout the subsequent centuries implicitly underpin those important phases of the continuing reaction to the revolutionary ideology of the Enlightenment, namely, the Action Française from the late nineteenth century to the first half of the twentieth century.

### **iii. The Dilemma of Limited Politics: “*Parliamentary Practice*” and “*Political Reflection*” under the Restoration**

At the restoration of the Bourbon dynasty in 1814-1815, the *Ultras*, the Ultra-royalist traditionalist and conservative party, to whom Bonald belonged, were faced with an almost existential dilemma. The then ministry, in agreement with the wishes of Louis XVIII, was in favour of retaining the institutions and laws that emerged under the preceding revolutionary and imperial regimes, which was unacceptable to the Ultras who were determined to undermine this synthesis of old and new regimes. In 1816, for example, Bonald was successful in seeking and procuring the abolition of divorce. A return as such to the *Ancien Régime* was impossible but the Ultras were convinced of the necessity to abolish the centralising institutions of the Bonaparte era in order to recover the ancient liberties that were the touchstone of the aristocratic and organic ideal of society to which they all subscribed. Their dilemma consisted precisely in that such a return could only be effected by a quasi-despotic exercise of the centralised power they excoriated so much<sup>85</sup>.

These ancient liberties were those of the ancient *parlements* and estates of the French provinces, and the remnants of the feudal system that perdured down to the eve of the French Revolution. Under such a system, or rather, a network of systems, before the rigid centralisation that took place under Louis XIV, the monarchy in France, while being the seat of sovereignty

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<sup>84</sup> Cf. The Anti-Metaphysical spirit as analysed by Vittorio Possenti. *Nihilism and Metaphysics: The Third Voyage* (New York: SUNY Press, 2015).

<sup>85</sup> René Rémond, op.cit., pp.53-60.

and the arbiter of all privileges, and in that sense, absolute, was, in fact, limited by the fundamental laws of the realm, among which was the famous Salic Law, fixing the succession to the French Crown through agnatic male primogeniture. While such a vision was susceptible to the anachronistic distortions of romantic imaginations, it nevertheless rested on the firm ground of the principle of a style of politics that was inherently wedded to the notions of subsidiarity and organicism. The Ultras no doubt realised that both royal centralisation, especially of the preceding two centuries and the revolutionary and imperial ventures had this in common: they were both actuated by the belief that society can and ought to be changed according to abstract ideas, either of unlimited sovereignty or of boundless rationality. The Ultras were inclined to be sceptical of both. And it precisely such a scepticism that can be said to lie at the very heart of a conservative attitude towards a revolutionary style of politics. The Ultras were, therefore, faced with a very particular philosophical problem, which remains the primary and abiding challenge for conservative thought.

They had, in the words of O'Sullivan<sup>86</sup>, to "*show that the world imposes limitations upon what either the individual or the state can hope to achieve without destroying the stability of society*". In O'Sullivan's understanding, the conservative resistance to change is expressed precisely in terms of an ideological opposition to the beliefs of the Enlightenment: in the commitment to a notion of the imperfectability of man, and in the consequent need for a limited style of politics. Theologically, the two ideas were connected: the imperfectability of man, linked as it was to original sin, meant that if politics were to be conceived as a purely human activity (as the revolutionaries claimed) not in need of redemption, it could not possibly hope to escape the stamp of imperfection and of sin. The history of Christendom is the story of attempts to create a system of states around notions of spiritual unity accompanied by parallel attempts to effect the emancipation of politics from the demands of Christian revelation and to articulate the principles of national unity and international cooperation on grounds that are not explicitly theological.

The trope of the emancipation of politics from theology, and more broadly, religion, which informed the political imagination of the Enlightenment has deep roots in the history of the relations between the religious and the political in European history. Thus, in order to be able to locate and appreciate the context of the theological antecedents of both the Enlightenment understanding of politics, and its conservative critique, and, as mentioned in the foregoing

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<sup>86</sup> Noël O'Sullivan. *Conservatism*. London: J.M. Dent & Sons Ltd, 1976, pp.11-12.

section, the place of Bonald in this chapter of the history of ideas, an attempt at understanding the evolution of the national state together with the concomitant emergence of conservative thinking must be undertaken.

#### **iv. Church and State**

Historically, this idea of a limited style of politics can be related to the emergence and growth of the centralised nation-state, which tentatively corresponds, if Dawson is to be followed<sup>87</sup>, to the period going from the end of the 13<sup>th</sup> century to the Protestant Reformation. It was then, Dawson argues, that the great synthesis of Christendom, from the reforms of the Ottonian and Gregorian eras down to the mid-13<sup>th</sup> century when those reforms had been solidly entrenched, began its decline. Christendom carried in itself, and displayed on the outside, all the characteristics of an international society united under the religious guidance of the papacy, and the nominal leadership of the Holy Roman Emperor. This was the old notion of the diarchy as expressed by pope Gelasius I in his epistle to the emperor Anastasius<sup>88</sup>. The kingdoms of France and England were then entering into a phase of national consolidation that would result in the enlargement of royal power in all spheres of life. The malaise at the heart of Christendom, palpable in the Investiture Controversy, manifested itself in a most visible and physical way in the Avignon Papacy and the Western Schism.

The attempts at finding a durable resolution of this crisis was attended by the twin manifestation of conciliarism (the grounds for which had been prepared in the preceding centuries) and the early inceptions of what would later develop into nationalism. The Council of Constance, for instance, with the explicit support of the secular powers, held itself to be superior to the roman pontiffs, and to be empowered to judge and to depose them. Conciliarism, in this respect can be considered as the ultimate attempt to adapt the fine balances of power that characterised the old structures of Christendom to the new political condition characterised by administrative and fiscal centralisation around within a national unit. Thus, church reform came to be conceived from the perspective of the emerging political order, from within the church itself. As Dawson put it: “...now the danger of secularisation came from within... The reforming party began to look to the state as the power that might free the Church from the incubus of

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<sup>87</sup> Christopher Dawson. *The Dividing of Christendom*. London: Sidgwick & Jackson, 1971. The second chapter on the breakdown of the unity of Christendom is particularly relevant here.

<sup>88</sup> Cf. Pope St. Gelasius I, *Famuli Vestrae Pietatis*: in Andreas Thiel (ed.), *Epistolae Romanorum Pontificum*, Vol.1 (Braunsberg: Eduard Peter, 1868), pp.349-358.

*material wealth and leave it free to devote all its energies to its spiritual functions*".<sup>89</sup> The rise of monarchical absolutism and nationalism happened at the same time so that some of the social functions performed by the Church in the old model of Christendom are taken from it and assumed (not immediately) by the secular powers. While such social functions are not always materially tangible, and their transfer to the secular authorities not always recognisable, they are at least very often symbolic. The valorisation of "*national*" languages over and sometimes against the Latin language, the consolidation of civil, common and customary laws vis-à-vis canon law, and the conflicts regarding the jurisdiction of the ecclesiastical and royal chanceries in fiscal matters, are all instances where functions fulfilled by the Church were effectively secularised through the offices of a royal administration that itself was an imitation of the centralised, international and competent papal bureaucracy.

Dawson also describes the Conciliar Movement as "*the culmination of mediaeval constitutionalism in its attempts to give constitutional form to the ideal of Christendom as a single religious society, divided political among a number of national kingdoms*".<sup>90</sup> Thus, the proponents of Conciliarism wanted to preserve the unity of Christendom in the face of the ongoing political evolution, as much as the Christian humanism of an Erasmus would later seek to preserve its unity in the face of the challenges of the "*New Knowledge*"; but it is significant that it sought to do so by relying as much as possible upon national units. It may well be argued that in a Christendom rent apart by the Great Schism, the leaders of the movement could not possibly have done otherwise. Yet, the effects were far reaching, since this policy relied on a close identification of the particular churches with their respective national units.

The old idea of Christendom, indeed, had relied, not upon the notion of a strict and impermeable separation, but that of independence of the Church with respect to the political structures. It was the idea of the *libertas ecclesiae*, which had been at the heart of the reforms of the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> centuries. Indeed, the idea of Christendom was based on the balance between the autonomy of Church and that of the political entities that had embraced Christianity resulting in a system of mutual recognition of privileges and jurisdictional limitations. By the 15<sup>th</sup> century, however, such an autonomy, instantiated as it was in the very efficient system of administration mentioned above, had become to be perceived as a threat to the centralised royal administration. While this autonomy was a constitutive feature of the large feudal society made up of a diversity of corporations and estates, it was regarded increasingly

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<sup>89</sup> Christopher Dawson. *op.cit.*, p.22.

<sup>90</sup> Dawson, *ibid.*, p.27.

as anomaly in the kingdoms that were pursuing policies of “*national*” unification and centralisation<sup>91</sup>. While some rulers were genuinely interested in ecclesiastical reform, others promoted it when they saw that this could be a way to further despoil the Church for their own benefit. That reform was necessary was disputed by few: the Church both as a supranational organisation and as a feudal body within the national units of Christendom was a major landowner and controlled large amounts of resources, natural, fiscal or human, and the clerical corruption decried by the friars (for example, Savonarola) was rife. The aim of the reform movements from the 11<sup>th</sup> century onwards (Cistercian, Franciscan, etc.) was precisely to return to a stricter observation of the evangelical counsel of poverty. The question was how can the Church balance the ownership of such resources with the commandments of the Gospel. The affirmation of papal power in the Italic peninsula after the Great Schism and the wars of the pontificates of Alexander VI and of his successors involved a fair amount of display of the temporal wealth and power of the Bishop of Rome<sup>92</sup>.

There is little doubt that this was the culmination of a process of mutual transfer of symbols and ideas pertaining to the respective self-understanding of the Church and of the State. On the one hand, the canonists, especially decretalists, had been mining the corpus of Roman imperial civil law, not only to establish the claims of the papacy, but also to fix the notion of the Church as a juridical society. The secularisation of the visible organisation of the Church was accompanied by a concurrent sacralisation of the state by civilians and other jurists who were keen to apply ecclesiological notions and images to the state. Ernst Kantorowicz gave a most authoritative review of the ways in which this happened in his famous study “*The King’s Two Bodies*”.<sup>93</sup> Regarding the shift that took place in the mediaeval notions of kingship, he noted: “*Once the idea of a political community endowed with a mystical character had been*

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<sup>91</sup> This process continued down the centuries, culminating somewhat in the achievement of Italian unification in the 1870s, the loss of the Papal States, and the precarious independence of the papacy up to the Lateran Treaty of 1929.

<sup>92</sup> Dawson, op.cit., p.71: “*Unfortunately, the Papacy, largely through its own fault, no longer possessed the power or the reforming spirit that had characterised it from Gregory VII to Innocent III. During the 15<sup>th</sup> century it had become profoundly secularised and deeply involved in secular politics, above all in the power politics of the Italian states. Its nominal omnipotence was in practice limited, on the one hand by the need to cooperate with the growing power of the sovereign state (...), and on the other by the need to conciliate the ecclesiastical oligarchy which controlled the collusion of the episcopal authorities with the secular power.*” Dawson’s diagnostic of the papacy in the 15<sup>th</sup> century deserves to be quoted extensively, if only for the fact that it encapsulates at once the internal and external predicament of the Papacy as an organisation of its times, in contrast to a more theological understanding of its mission, which after the Conciliarist episode will be taken up again in the polemics with the Reformers, in the decrees of the Council of Trent, and in the apologetic work of the later Counter-Reformation, especially, with Robert Bellarmine (*De Romano Pontifice*) and Johannes a Sancto Thoma.

<sup>93</sup> Ernst H. Kantorowicz. *The King’s Two Bodies: A Study in Mediaeval Political Theology*. Princeton: Princeton University Press 1957.

*articulated by the Church, the secular state was almost forced to follow the lead – to respond by providing an antitype. This view does not detract from the complexity of other stimuli which were perhaps even more effective: Aristotelian doctrines, Roman and Canon Law theories, the political, social and economic development at large during the later Middle Ages. But those stimuli seem to have worked in the same direction: towards making the polity co-eternal with the Church and bringing the polity – with or without a king – to the centre of political discussion”.*<sup>94</sup> The secularisation of the visible organisation of the Church variously took the shape, for example, of ecclesiastical polities within the Holy Roman Empire, and, also, of the consolidation of the Clergy as one of the estates of some realms, even, in the case of France, gaining the position of first estate, above the nobility and the commoners. The old scriptural image of the Body, of the corpus, was being formalised in the legal understanding of the secular jurists, and was degraded as a mere indication of antiquarian interest among canonists. The material and worldly interests of the organisation of the Roman Church as a human and physical organisation and association, inserted within the *jus commune* of Christendom, somewhat obscured the deeper theology of the trope of the *corpus mysticum*<sup>95</sup> as the locus where ecclesiology and sacramental theology were intermingled. The forgetfulness, or rather, marginalisation of such a trope within ecclesiology (in favour of the concept of *societates perfectae*) was doubtless related to an immanentising tendency to equate the divine constitution of the Church with the contingent historical forms ecclesiastical organisation happens to assume throughout history, which itself was a result of the need to articulate the legitimacy of the worldly claims of the Church over and against comparable secular claims and encroachments. And this latent theological predicament would not take long to manifest itself in concrete moments of crisis, where abuses would reach climactic points, followed by denunciations and attempts at correction and reform.

## **The Cases of Germany and England**

Abuses were doubtless widespread in Germany where the feudal structure of the Holy Roman Empire was too loose for the Emperor (in spite of the centralising tendencies of the Hapsburg imperial policy) to exert any significant power upon the multitude of vassals, tenants and cities

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<sup>94</sup> Kantorowicz, op.cit., pp.231-232.

<sup>95</sup> For the tacit dialogue between Kantorowicz (and Lubac) and Schmitt, see Jennifer Rust, *Political Theologies of the Corpus Mysticum: Schmitt, Kantorowicz and De Lubac* in *Political Theology and Early Modernity*, ed. Etienne Balibar, Chicago-Chicago University Press, 2012, pp.102-124.



that comprised it; it was also where, in no small part due to papal fiscal policy and curial nepotism, hatred of Italians was prevalent. It is in this context that the Lutheran reformation erupted in 1517, and it would be no exaggeration to say that the subsequent course it took was largely responsible, among other things, for the decline of the empire<sup>96</sup>. The political situation was supplemented by the scandals of simony, the sale of indulgences, the plurality of benefices, non-residence, nepotism etc. The powerlessness of Charles V to prevent the spread of Lutheran ideas and their adoption by some of the princes signalled effectively the beginning of the end, not only for the Holy Roman Empire, but also and above all for the idea of Christendom with the Empire at its – theoretical – centre. The theological restlessness of Luther found an echo in the political restlessness of some of the German princes. In 1525, the grand-master of the Teutonic Knights, with the encouragements of Luther, secularised the Order and gathered its possessions (outside of the Holy Roman Empire) into a new state known as the Duchy of Prussia, held in fief to the King of Poland. Luther's theological ideas, such as his anti-hierarchical understanding of the priesthood of believers, was also taken up by the leaders of the concurrent Peasants' Revolt. Here, however, Luther, realising that the Peasants' Revolt might unleash forces destructive of the empire itself, made common cause with the Princes. And this type of political positioning, indeed, was to become a feature of Lutheranism in the Empire subsequently: theological radicalism (or, as per the perspective, heresy) that allies itself to a rather strict social conservatism. The reference for such a social conservatism is no longer the old notion of Christendom, but rather the individual political entities, understood as Christian societies over and against the hierarchical, sacramental and juridical idea of the Church espoused by the Catholic Church<sup>97</sup>. This state of affairs, which itself would be later articulated as in the maxim *cujus regio, ejus religio*, was formalised at the Diet of Augsburg in 1555. It is unthinkable that such a principle could have held any sway under the classical model of Western Christendom, the Gelasian diarchy, whereof the overarching authority of the Pope was a fundamental, integral and non-negotiable feature<sup>98</sup>. The principles of Augsburg would help maintain peace between Catholics and Protestants (except in the Netherlands) until the late 1610s when war erupted, at first within the Empire itself, and then, between states, until around 1648. At the end of the war, the fragile fabric of the Holy Roman Empire, and by

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<sup>96</sup> The regime of dual fiscality, both secular and ecclesiastical, was regarded as a great hindrance for the enactment of political reforms and “national” unification. France, on the other hand, by virtue of the centralised nature of its royal administration, had been able to negotiate the payment of taxes to the Holy See, especially, in the Pragmatic Sanction of Bourges enacted by Charles VII in 1438.

<sup>97</sup> Cf. Luther's “*Appeal to the Christian Nobility of the German nation*”.

<sup>98</sup> The freedom thus gained from an international organisation such as the Roman Church enabled the rulers to pursue the twin tasks of centralisation and the “rationalisation” of the feudal system.

extension, of Western Christendom, was even more compromised, to the benefit of national units (France, Prussia, etc.).

But the new Protestant German states were not the first to reject papal authority. Already, in 1534 Henry VIII had Parliament declare him “*Supreme Head of the Church*” and the Church of England thereby lost the independence it had enjoyed from the centralising control of the Crown. The English Reformation could be understood at once in the context of the imperial pretensions of the Tudor monarchy over the British Isles, and the means they used in the prosecution of the same. The feeling of dynastic insecurities and the quest for legitimacy of the early Tudors led them to lean heavily on Parliament as a means to define, exalt and assert their authority. While the monarchs saw the whole parliamentary process as an instrument, and a popular one, the Houses of Parliament, and especially, the Commons, started to consider themselves the partners of the Crown in government. This in itself was neither the immediate result nor the intention of Tudor policy; rather it was part of an ongoing process whereby the relationship between the different estates of the realm and the monarch was being articulated in terms of body and corporation, based on the scholastic conceptions of corporeity and their adoption into the law<sup>99</sup>. The Tudor monarchs were reputed skilful in dealing with Parliament; the following dynasty would prove less so.

The Stuarts inherited not only what may be loosely termed “*Tudor absolutism*” but also brought with them ideas of monarchy and kingship that were fashioned by their experience of the Reformation in Scotland, and especially by the impact Presbyterian ideas had on the polity of both church and state. According to Kenyon<sup>100</sup>, the opponents of the monarchy under the early Stuarts, far from being extreme radicals, “*were for the most part sturdy reactionaries who wanted nothing more than to restore the ‘ancient constitution’ of a century, perhaps even two or three centuries before*”. His contention was that both royalist and parliamentarian factions adhered to more or less the same understanding of the English constitution but differed on the practical division of powers and jurisdictions. Nevertheless, it remains highly likely that the parliamentarian faction was not actuated solely by an antiquarian desire to revive the true constitution of the realm but also by religious convictions that sprang out of Calvinism, and that were the very opposite of what Charles, through Laud, was promoting within the Church of England. In other words, it is not unlikely that both Crown and Parliament were adhering to

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<sup>99</sup> Kantorowicz, op.cit. cf. Chapter 1.

<sup>100</sup> J.P. Kenyon. *The Stuart Constitution 1603-1688: Documents and Commentary*. (Cambridge: at the University Press, 1966), p.7.

two different trends of Protestantism (one *Lutherano-Arminian*, the other Calvinistic), which, in turn, coloured their respective interpretation of the constitution. It is significant that even after the execution of Charles I, in the Act purporting to abolish the kingly office, the abolition is presented as a necessary step in the return to the ancient constitution<sup>101</sup>. While the abolition of the monarchy was in line with the doctrinal positions of the more extreme elements both within and outside of the New Model Army and of Parliament, it was here nevertheless justified by way of appeal to a view of the primitive constitution of England, redolent of the antiquarian conservatism (if still somewhat tinged with Puritanism) of the Cokes and Pym of the preceding generation. In the “*Instrument of Government*” of 1653, supreme legislative power was vested both “*in one person, and the people assembled in Parliament*”.<sup>102</sup> The executive power was vested in that one person, namely, the Lord Protector, who was to exercise the chief magistracy, and who also was to be considered the fount of all honour and justice in the Commonwealth. In this, a transfer of all the former functions and properties of kingship to the Lord Protector is evident. The latter, enjoying his tenure for life, was to govern with the advice of a Council and the consent of Parliament. The typical Protestant and Puritanical advocacy of sola scriptura and nostalgia for a primitive and purer Christianity finds its expression in Article xxxv of the Instrument stipulating “*that the Christian religion, as contained in the Scriptures, be held forth and recommended as the public profession of these nations*” (i.e. England, Scotland and Ireland). In addition, in Article xxxvii liberty of religion is assured those who “*profess faith in God by Jesus Christ (though differing in judgement from the doctrine, worship or discipline publicly held forth)*” to the exception of Catholics and those advocating an episcopal ecclesial polity. Government with the consent of Parliament and the settlement of the Protestant religion (especially with regards to the succession to the throne and to public offices) are the primary features of the revolution of 1688, later to be understood as the cornerstones of the British constitution. The change in that constitution from the late 15<sup>th</sup> century to the late 17<sup>th</sup> century, namely, the evolution of Parliament itself from being the instrument of the Tudor monarchy to being a partner, and the politically significant partner, in government is to be noted: from the instrument that would enable the royal supremacy in religious matters (and other matters) to the force that sees itself as the guarantor of the Protestant settlement even in the face of that royal supremacy. Thus, the ideas of 1688 were not exactly novel, nor yet ancient, and they do

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<sup>101</sup> Kenyon, *ibid.*, p.340: “*And whereas by the abolition of the kingly office provided for in this Act a most happy way is made for this nation (if God see it good) to return to its just and ancient right of being governed by its own Representatives or National Meetings in Council, from time to time chosen and entrusted for that purpose by the people...*”

<sup>102</sup> Kenyon, *ibid.*, p.342.

not so much represent a radical break from the past as constitute one of the two main competing strands of conservative thought and action. On the other hand, the ideological antagonists of the demagogues of 1688 were those who adhered to kingship, as settled in the Stuart dynasty, as the divinely appointed form of government of the realm, whose right to rule no earthly authority could negate, and that was theoretically limited only by divine law. While Jacobitism and the Nonjuring schism were instances of the prosecution of Stuart legitimacy to their respective political and ecclesiastical conclusions, royalist conservatism had to adapt itself, not least on account of the eventual failure of the Jacobite adventure and the consolidation of the Hanoverian succession. Thus, even before Burke had contrived to articulate a synthesis of royal and parliamentary conservatisms, of the Old Tory and Old Whig positions, the Country Party, as opposed to the Court party, represented a harmonisation of these two strands<sup>103</sup>. In the process of harmonisation, the ideas of 1688, enumerated above, caused the fundamental belief of the Stuart monarchy, namely, the divine right of kings, to be muted and to retreat from the mainstream of British political culture. The royalism of the new conservative synthesis thus came to rely upon arguments based on laws, customs and conventions to defend the monarchy. The latter was no more coterminous with sovereignty, which was understood to be vested not in the people, nor in the Crown, nor in the legislature singly, but rather, in the King-in-Parliament.

### **France, Revolution and the Civil Constitution of the Clergy**

In France, the assertion of the sovereignty of the Crown over its feudal vassals (and at an early stage, vis-à-vis, the Holy Roman Empire) was a process that roughly started with the first Capetian Kings and ended during the revolutionary period. Over this long period of time, the Kings of France pursued a policy of extension of the royal demesne from their original possessions around Paris to include much of what is comprised within the current continental territory of the French Republic. Thus, it was during this lengthy process that the *Ancien Régime* came to assume what Bernard Barbiche considers to be its fundamental characteristics,

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<sup>103</sup> The collaboration of Bolingbroke, the Jacobite freethinker and the Whig Pulteney on the periodical the *Craftsman* is, in this respect, indicative of the rapprochement. Cf. Andrew Mansfield. *Ideas of Monarchical Reform: Fenelon, Jacobitism and the political works of the Chevalier Ramsay*. (Manchester: at the University Press, 2015), especially the first two chapters.

namely, the fusion of powers, the system of privileges, absolutism, monarchical administration, the development of centralisation, and the growth of the state<sup>104</sup>.

Legislative, executive and judicial powers were all vested in the King and in his agents – the competencies and jurisdictions of courts, assemblies, estates overlapped and often conflicted with one another. At the local level, judicial and administrative functions were fused: magistrates were administrators, and administrators had judicial functions. Pluralism and legal particularism were embedded in the fabric of society itself, which was a collection of estates, corporations, guilds, provinces, municipalities, etc., each endowed with their own provincial statutes and customs, bye-laws, regulations, privileges. The royal administration of the kingdom was, therefore, mediated in and through these intermediary bodies, and it was principally in and through them that the whole regime of rights, privileges and obligations informed the lives of individuals and families. The king was the ultimate arbiter of the kingdom, all disputes relating to this regime of privilege were to be settled by him alone, through his agents and his courts. It is precisely through this supreme function of arbitration that the notion of royal absolutism ought to be understood<sup>105</sup>. Thus, from such a perspective, the exercise of royal absolutism is seen as being necessarily connected with the existence of subordinate and subsidiary, dependent and quasi-autonomous jurisdictions and bodies within the French realm. There could be no appeal against its authority within the boundaries of the realm.

It is easy to see how this principle could occasion awkwardness and ambiguity when the first estate of the realm is the clergy of the Roman Catholic Church. The post-Reformation and post-Tridentine period in France was one in which the state and the Church, each with marked centralising policies and overlapping jurisdictions, were embroiled in controversies and disputes<sup>106</sup> regarding their respective spheres of authorities. The issue with the Church of France was that it was at once an internal component of the constitution and a part of the Roman

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<sup>104</sup> Bernard Barbiche. *Les institutions de la monarchie française à l'époque moderne*. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1999, p.3.

<sup>105</sup> Barbiche, op.cit., p.10: "*Sous Louis XVI comme sous François I, le pouvoir absolu était une fonction suprême d'arbitrage*". Cf. Peter R. Campbell, ed. *The Origins of the French Revolution*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006. The Introduction is quite comprehensive, esp. pp.14-16 with respect to absolutism.

<sup>106</sup> There was the question of the implementation of the decrees of the Council of Trent, which was delayed in France, due in no small measure to the civil strife of the Wars of Religion and the gallicanism that was entrenched in the *parlements*. Later, the awkwardness between the king and the papacy would also manifest itself in the disputes regarding the reception of the decisions of the Council of Trent within the French Church, and those concerning the *Droit de Régale*, that is, the right whereby the revenues of vacant sees were appropriated by the royal treasury for the duration of the vacancy. Originally, this right was limited to a few dioceses, until Louis XIV extended it to the whole of the realm.

Church, whose visible head, the Pope, was not only a figure of spiritual authority, but also a monarch. Ecclesiastical issues, thus, involved question both of domestic and international issues. Gallicanism was also, however, not so much the affirmation of royal arbitration over the Church of France, as much as the vindication of its rights not deriving from royal or papal decree, but from ecclesiastical canons, laws and customs, enshrined in the customary laws of France. Gallicanism was inherently political inasmuch as it relied upon the support of the monarchy, was expressed in the deliberations of the Assembly of the Clergy and enjoyed the favour and protection of the *parlements* and sovereign courts. These, in turn, whether of Paris or of the provinces, were almost entirely controlled by the nobility of robe, as much as the army was controlled by the old nobility of sword.

Certainly, the style of individual kings and the circumstances of their reigns left a stamp on the ways in which the “*gothic government*”<sup>107</sup> of France was carried out. The style in which Louis XIV understood and enacted his absolute power was unique and no doubt influenced his successors. But this style, and the ideas of royal majesty underlying it, did nothing, or rather, were quite powerless, to address the inherent, systemic problems of the French state – on the contrary, the attempts by his successors to imitate him led to a heightening of those internal crises. At the death of the Sun King and with the advent of the Regency during the minority of Louis XV, the *parlements*, having also been the refuge of Frondist sentiment, came back to the fore of political life<sup>108</sup>. Furthermore, the parliamentarian party and its pretensions vis-a-vis the monarchy regarding the interpretation of the fundamental laws was supported by the intellectual activity of memorialists, historians and publicists such as Saint-Simon, Boulainvilliers and Montesquieu. The *parlements* and the nobles in general could not but resent the appointment of commoners as chief ministers and royal counsellors. The attempts of the various ministers and superintendents to reform the finances of the realm and the tax system were seen as assaults upon the privileges and liberties of the *parlements*, and through them, of the nobility<sup>109</sup>.

But the ways in which the various parties interpreted and understood the old fundamental laws of France underwent significant changes. The change in interpretation also affected the conceptions of the realm as a community comprising of the monarchy and the three orders.

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<sup>107</sup> Cf. Montesquieu. *The Spirit of the Laws*. Book XI, chapter 8.

<sup>108</sup> The dissolute manners and mores, including the personal conduct of princes, of the Regency era and of the reign of Louis XV did much to strip the monarchy of its traditional sacred aura.

<sup>109</sup> Cf. Daniel Roche. *France in the Enlightenment*. Harvard: Harvard University Press, 1998, in particular Chapter 14 “*Crises in State and Society*”.

Cobban<sup>110</sup> notes a change in the parliamentary arguments of the first half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century (and earlier) and those of the later half. In the earlier arguments, the supporters of parliamentary privileges justified their position within the realm and their limited understanding of the monarchy on the basis of custom and history, even purporting to retrace the date of the institution of the *parlements* to the Carolingian, if not to the Merovingian dynasty itself. In the *Grandes Remonstrances* of 1753, the parliamentarians of Paris put forward the argument that the sovereign and the people are together bound by a contract, and that, if the people owe obedience to the king, he, in turn, owes obedience to the laws. In order to support their claims against the actions of the Crown, they appealed directly to an abstract right of the people, and not to history or to custom.

The change also expressed itself in the evolution of the notion of nation as applied to the French polity. According to Furet and Ozouf<sup>111</sup>, the question of nation originates in the struggles in French society in the face of increasing royal centralisation and the reinforcement of absolutism. The question thus emerged in times such as the Wars of Religion and the Fronde when the differences and opposition between society and state power came to the fore of political life. Louis XIV's style of absolutism was based upon a contradiction, namely, the maintenance of the orders within French society coupled with the political neutralisation of the orders taken individually (*parlements*, assemblies of the clergy, urban and rural authorities, guilds, etc.) or collectively (in the Estates General)<sup>112</sup>. This contradiction persisted and even reached its paroxysm under the following two reigns, where absolutism, requiring the support of the orders, still refused to associate them with the government of the realm. Thanks to the *philosophes* and the publicists, the old constitutional notion of France as a society organised in orders governed by the king gradually gave way to the more modern idea of a nation, the main qualification to be a member of which, was not membership of an order, but of the national community. This idea was already politically evident in the self-posturing of the *parlements* as the sole representatives of the nation (condemned by Louis XV in the famous *Séance de la Flagellation, or Session of the Scourging of 1766*)<sup>113</sup> from the Regency to the immediate pre-Revolutionary period, and, in a more latent manner, in the demands for the convocation of the Estates General. The orders into which society was divided eventually came to be seen as

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<sup>110</sup> Alfred Cobban. *Aspects of the French Revolution*. London: Paladin, 1971, pp.75-77.

<sup>111</sup> François Furet and Mona Ozouf. *Deux légitimations historiques de la société française au XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle: Mably et Boulainvilliers*. Annales. Histoire, Sciences Sociales, 34<sup>e</sup> Année, No.3 (May - Jun., 1979), pp.438-450.

<sup>112</sup> Cf. François Furet. *The French Revolution 1770-1814*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1992, 1996, pp.8-10.

<sup>113</sup> Cf. Daniel Teyssie. *Un modèle autoritaire: le discours de "la flagellation"*. Mots, n°43, juin 1995. Acte d'autorité, discours autoritaires. pp.118-127. The text of the declaration is also included with the article.

constituting the principal obstacle to the realisation of national unity, for they were founded on socio-political inequality and fostered it in turn.

This new idea of nation was most regularly expressed in the pre-Revolutionary period by those who wanted to introduce more equality in the fiscal regime and reduce the exemptions from the royal fiscal and financial policies on the basis of concessions and privileges. The genius of Sieyès, first in the *Essai sur les privilèges* published in 1788, was to equate the first two orders of French society, but more specifically, the second order, the nobility, with the entire system of privileges. In this sense, those who possess privileges and defend them put themselves outside the project of national unification and signify their refusal to belong to a nation defined primarily by the equality of its members. Following a contractarian logic, in order for the nation to be sovereign, it requires the aggregation of the equal and individual sovereignty of its several members. Seeing that privileges are exceptions to common laws, in other words, exceptions to the general and sovereign will, they have no place in a nation of equals. This equation of privileges with the second estate was factually incorrect, and probably intentionally misleading, in that the third estate, or rather, those bodies (towns, corporations, guilds, etc.) that composed the third estate were also endowed with privileges and exemptions from taxes<sup>114</sup>. The next step for Sieyès, in *Qu'est-ce que le Tiers-État?*, consisted in arguing that the mass of allegedly unprivileged Frenchmen was actually the one segment of society that materially supported the whole through labour, industry, trade and investment, and that it could thus claim to be a nation unto itself: the first two orders are a burden to the third estate, and they could never properly belong to the nation<sup>115</sup>.

The destruction of the society of orders and the concomitant “*transfer of sovereignty*”,<sup>116</sup> supported principally by the intellectual ground set by Sieyès, eventually took place in a series of episodes, from the abolition of the privileges (4<sup>th</sup> of August 1789) to the promulgation of the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen (approved by the National Assembly on the 26<sup>th</sup> of August 1789 and by the King on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of November of the same year), which itself, was used as the preamble to the Constitution of 1791. As per Article III of the Declaration, the principle of sovereignty is said to reside essentially in the nation, from which emanates all authority in the state. Power, authority and legitimacy are all vested in the nation. The political

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<sup>114</sup> Cf. Yves Durand. *Les privilèges selon Sieyès ou le triomphe de la désinformation*. Histoire, économie et société, vol.11, No.2, 1992, pp.295-323.

<sup>115</sup> Emmanuel Sieyès. *Qu'est-ce que le Tiers état?* Genève: Librairie Droz, 1970, pp.120-126.

<sup>116</sup> Jeremy Jennings. *Revolution and the Republic: A History of Political Thought in France since the Eighteenth Century*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011, p.75.



imperative became less the reform of the old order than the creation and implementation of a new one that would be as different as possible from the *Ancien Régime*. The independence of the provinces was broken, their courts and estates indefinitely prorogued, and their privileges suppressed. The administrative divisions of the whole country were reorganised, with many of the former provinces themselves divided into *départements* most of which were named after features of the local geography and landscape (e.g. rivers, la Dordogne, or mountains, Hautes Alpes), to the detriment of the local traditions and history. The remnants of the feudal rights, dues and fees were all abolished together with the old system of land tenure that went with it. The physical divisions of the territory and the system of land ownership were now made to reflect the new reality of the nation.

The clergy and the Church of France had somehow to be integrated into the nation. The majority of the representatives of the clergy in the first estate voted to join with the third estate, and thus, instrumental in the formation of the National Assembly. In a series of measures, including the suppression of tithing, the extensive financial autonomy hitherto enjoyed by the Church was ended, and most of ecclesiastical revenues and proceeds were channelled towards the payment of the national debt. The appropriation and sale of ecclesiastical property by the state to the public helped reinforce the commitment of a significant proportion of the French people, through their newly acquired property, to the Revolution<sup>117</sup>. In early 1790, the Assembly dissolved most religious orders and congregations, except those devoted to the care of children and of the sick, and prohibited religious vows. This reorganisation of the Church of France eventually culminated in the Civil Constitution of the Clergy passed by the Assembly on the 12<sup>th</sup> of July 1790 in spite of the protestations of some of the bishops and of the Pope. The desired effect of the new ecclesiastical legislation by the Assembly was the assimilation of the Church into the state as a department of government and administration. This was not exactly unprecedented in nominally Catholic realms, especially in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Already in the early 1780s in the Holy Roman Empire (or least in those territories directly under the rule of the emperor), Joseph II initiated a series of measures that brought the church and religious orders into the control of the state, in line with Enlightenment ideas.

It is also not exactly clear whether this new state of affairs for the Church was directly the result of Gallicanism understood as a set of principles as much as an attempt to synthesise Gallican

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<sup>117</sup> François Furet. op.cit., p.81. A similar situation occurred in England at the dissolution of the monasteries by Henry VIII in the late 1530s and early 1540s. The sale of alienated church property to the gentry and merchant classes ensured their attachment to the English Reformation in its various stages.

principles with the new ideology of the nation. No doubt there was a brand of Gallicanism wedded to the Jansenist movement, popular in the parliamentary circles, that wanted the Church of France to be as independent as possible from the Roman pontiff – be it, at the cost of being completely submerged within the structure of the state. The old Gallicanism of Bossuet, expressed in the Declaration of the Four Articles in 1682 stipulated the temporal independence of kings with respect to the papacy, confirmed the ancient liberties and customs of the Church of France, and more significantly, reaffirmed the Conciliarist teaching of the council of Constance and of the Pragmatic Sanction of Bourges. This Gallicanism<sup>118</sup> was at home in the society of orders, permeated with subsidiarity and customs, in which the Church was recognised as an autonomous corporation within the state, with its own deliberative assembly. Under the new regime, the liberties and the financial autonomy were gone; only the control of the state, now maximised, and indeed, rendered absolute, remained<sup>119</sup>.

Resistance to the Civil Constitution of the Clergy also came from the Assembly itself. The Archbishop of Aix, Boisgelin, who previously had supported the revolutionary movement, published *“Exposition des principes sur la constitution civile du clergé”* in which, while recognising the need for reform, he questioned the competency of the National Assembly to legislate on spiritual matters without the concurrence of the episcopate; he also called for a reunion of provincial and national councils that would potentially restore some deliberative autonomy to the Church vis-à-vis the new regime. Louis XVI delayed giving his assent to the Civil Constitution while he was engaged in negotiations with all concerned, most notably with the Holy See, but finally succumbed to the pressure of the Assembly and of public opinion, and gave his assent in December 1790. Included in the Civil Constitution was an oath that bishops and priests were bound to take before being consecrated or ordained to their respective orders. It stipulated not only loyalty to the King and the French nation, but also, support for the Civil Constitution. In other words, it was designed to ensure that bishops and priests would not question precisely the competency and power of the National Assembly to legislate on ecclesiastical matters. The National Assembly’s attitude in this matter demonstrated a radically immanentist and localist understanding of the Church, that flew in the face of traditional ecclesiology that taught the transcendental and universal nature of the Church, alongside its

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<sup>118</sup> Cf. René Epp. Un jugement sévère de 1819 sur la Constitution civile du clergé. *Revue des Sciences Religieuses*, tome 63, fascicule 1-2, 1989, pp.71-83. Epp draws a distinction between moderate Gallicanism and the more moderate and “mainstream” trend: *“Dire simplement que la Constitution civile du clergé est le produit du gallicanisme est inexact. C’est aussi être pour le moins incomplet que de prétendre qu’à cette ecclesiologie qui conditionne la Constitution civile du clergé s’oppose l’ecclesiologie ultramontaine et tridentine”*, p.73.

<sup>119</sup> François Furet. *op.cit.*, p.84.

more human aspects. In other words, the Church presented a significant challenge to the ideology of the nation. The Church and the Nation (through the National Assembly) both laid claims to totality; but both also articulated their respective claims to totality in different ways. The Church claimed for itself the supernatural life of Man while the Nation claimed his natural life. However, the Church also recognised the natural life and all its legitimate pursuits, and has seldom - with any consistency, at least - sought to legislate on every aspect of human life, except where it coincided with the spiritual or supernatural. The Nation, on the other hand, sought to circumscribe the whole life of Man in a way such that negated its supernatural dimension as traditionally understood; ecclesial governance and administration were to be comprehended within the legislative powers of the Nation, irrespective of the existing constitution of the Church. The constitution of the Church, in turn, was not only an, abstract, spiritual one, but also a concrete, universal, and, thus, international one, with the Roman Pontiff as its visible head. The inevitable antagonism expressed itself primarily in a procedural form: the disregard of canonical standards and the rejection of the possibility of convoking a national council by the National Assembly. But behind this question of procedure was a real conflict of principles. The Gallicanism of the Ancien Régime was tolerable, from a theological and canonical point of view, as long as the Church of France was the first estate of the realm, endowed with deliberative power, and enjoying communion with the Roman Pontiff, as mentioned above; this state of affairs did not fundamentally challenge the constitution of the universal Church.

From a theological point of view, the main question was that of the competency of the National Assembly to reorganise the Church, and that question could not be answered, by the majority of French Bishops and by the Pope, in a way that recognised and legitimised the pretensions of the Assembly. In spite of including a number of bishops and priests amongst its members, the National Assembly was not an explicitly Catholic body, and it had even refused to recognise Catholicism as state religion. In addition to Boisgelin's *Exposition*, the Bishop of Boulogne, Jean-René Asseline, issued a pastoral letter in which he opposed the Civil Constitution on the basis of the proper distinction between the spiritual authority of the Church and the temporal power of the state. The conversion of princes to Christianity do not institute them as rulers over the Church; rather, as members thereof, they are bound both to protect its liberties and to ensure that dissenters and innovators comply with the canons and ecclesiastical decisions. As much as the Church has no right to the temporal administration of the political society, the latter has no right in the administration of the Church; both are independent in the exercise of their

respective rights, while supporting and helping one another. Furthermore, “*if every national church is in the state, every Catholic state is in the Church*”.<sup>120</sup> In support of the principle of the distinction of ecclesiastical authority and political power, Asseline marshals a number of authorities, mostly drawn from the moderate Gallican school of Bossuet and Fénelon, and from ecclesiastical historians such as Fleury. In one of the quotations from Bossuet’s Sermon preached at the Assembly of the Clergy in 1681 is a direct reference to the principles of the distinction of sacerdotium and imperium found in Pope Gelasius’s Letter to Emperor Anastasius (vide supra). The Gelasian dyarchy, that was at the heart of the understanding of mediaeval Christendom, found itself totally overturned by the National Assembly. According to Asseline, the reformation of the Church could never require any usurpation of spiritual authority by the political power; on the contrary, such usurpation was tantamount to aggression upon the rights and the freedoms of the Church. The duty for initiating any process of reform or return to the primitive customs belongs to the bishops, who are the successors of the Apostles, and not to any particular, national and political assembly. Thus, in matters spiritual, the faithful ought to obey the pastors of the Church, and not the civil magistrate, who has no power to ordain anything in the spiritual realm. Towards the end of his letter, Asseline exhorts his flock to remain faithful not only to himself and to the other bishops who would not subscribe to the mandatory oath, but also to the Pope: “*Never lose sight of this truth, that our holy father the Pope is the vicar of Jesus Christ upon earth, the visible head of the universal church, and common father of all the faithful; and render unto him always the respect and obedience due to him on these grounds*”.<sup>121</sup>

As far as Bonald was concerned, this appeal to the supernatural character of the Church and the need for communion with the Roman Pontiff did not fall on deaf ears. As president of the departmental assembly of the Aveyron, it would have fallen upon him to ensure that the provisions of the Civil Constitution were fully implemented and that the oath be administered to bishops and priests. Up to that point, Bonald had been happy to participate in what truly reforming movements accompanied these early stages of the French Revolution, while helping to maintain order within his region. The promulgation of the Civil Constitution of the Clergy marked his break with those reforming movements, as he came to see they were inextricably linked to an ideology that was bent upon not merely reforming the ancient institutions of France, but, rather change it profoundly according to what could only be termed a hermeneutic,

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<sup>120</sup> Jean-René Asseline. *Pastoral Letter on the Spiritual Authority and the New Civil Constitution of the Clergy*. Translation of the original issued in 1790, published in Dublin in 1791, printed by P. Wogan, p.13.

<sup>121</sup> Asseline, *ibid.*, p.31-32.

not of continuity, but of rupture, an ideology of the *tabula rasa*, whereby society was to reorganised entirely according to an extreme conception of national sovereignty. The promulgation of the Civil Constitution, itself seen as emblematic of the whole revolutionary venture, its effects on French society and its long-term significance for the relationships between Church and State were the occasion for Bonald to ponder the relationship between the spiritual and temporal realm from the perspective of society. The “*The Theory of Political and Religious Power in Civil Society, established through reason and history*” of 1796, his very first work, can be said to contain much of the fruits of these ponderings, and such themes as will remain constant throughout the rest of his work. An examination of these themes will furnish the matter of the rest of this thesis.



## Chapter 2

### Introduction of Bonald's Social Philosophy

The present chapter is an exposition of Bonald's philosophy of society based upon a reading of his first published political treatise: *Théorie du pouvoir politique et religieux*<sup>122</sup> (hereafter *Théorie*). This treatise already contains the substance of the themes that will be developed in his subsequent works on political philosophy, both in the light of the severely restrained and disciplined evolution of Bonald's own thinking, and in that of the then current political events.

#### A. Love, Will and Force in God, Man and Society

"One cannot consider society without speaking of man, nor yet speak of man without rising up to God"<sup>123</sup>: This programmatic connection of society, man and God in an anagogical ascent of knowledge ("rising up to God") opens Bonald's first published work, the *Théorie du pouvoir politique et religieux*, which is concerned primarily with the relations between God, man and society by way of response to the ideas of the Enlightenment, of Montesquieu and of Rousseau, and of certain jusnaturalist positions that inspired the latter, on the same subjects. His aim is to show how the fact of society can be derived from the fact of God, creator of the world yet distinct from it, and to draw out what he believes to be the necessary consequences of such a connection between the two. His method, as stated in the title, partakes both of discursive and historical demonstration; it is a method that follows the paths of knowledge (again, of God, man and society) opened to us by the experience of society and reflection about it, instead of, the experience and contemplation of Being. Yet, what matters to Bonald is not so much to prove God's existence, as to assume it and build upon it, through a series of propositions deductively connected among themselves, the edifice of his understanding and of his defence of society and tradition.

The starting point of the *Théorie* is a consideration of the attributes and activities of God such as his spiritual or intellectual nature, his self-knowledge, self-love, self-preservation, will, freedom, action, power, and their intimate connection with one another. As a pure and infinite intellectual being, God knows himself in an infinite way and with an infinite love, and thus wills to preserve himself through an act of his infinite will, and therefore, preserves himself by

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<sup>122</sup> Louis de Bonald. *Théorie du pouvoir politique et religieux dans la société civile démontrée par le raisonnement et par l'histoire* (originally published in 1796, the edition used here is that 1854 edition of the *Œuvres de M. de Bonald* published by the Librairie d'Adrien Le Clère in Paris).

<sup>123</sup> Bonald. *Théorie*, p.121.

virtue of his infinite power. God's infinite self-knowledge, infinite self-love and infinite self-preservation all converge to the one act of God's being: all these *operations* are not distinct in God himself on account of divine simplicity. Yet, while not distinct in God, they are distinct in their temporal effects in the creaturely realm. Creation is that act of God whereby being is given to that which was not being, that is, out of nothing God makes something and imparts being to it. Here Bonald sees a correlation between the object of God's will, his own eternal self-preservation, derived from his own eternal and pure self-love, and the effect of that will as expressed through the act of creation.

Ultimately, God's self-love is the motive for his creative activity, and his love for the creatures is for him the motive of their preservation. This love expresses itself in different degrees depending upon the ways in which the creatureliness of creatures relates to God himself. In the scheme of creation, Man was created in the image and likeness of God: this similitude being the distinctive feature of Man's creatureliness, and the basis of God's relation to Man. God's love for Man as a creature is enhanced by this proximity through the similitude; this love, in turn, is the principle of the preservation of Man. Thus, not only did God create Man by virtue of his own ineffable self-love, he also preserves him because of the latter's similitude to himself. In Man, though only analogically, one finds intellect, will, love and power, all elements of the spiritual being of Man for "*the love of beings similar to himself is in God the power that preserves beings*".<sup>124</sup> Even though God's existence and self-preservation does not depend of Man's knowledge of him, yet, Bonald thought that God, at a purely empirical level, can only be present to Man insofar as Man makes God the object of his thoughts and the end of his love. But Man is a composite being made up of an intellectual nature and of a corporal one. His similitude to God is restricted to that of the intellectual and rational nature. Bonald calls the body the *exterior being* of Man. Man can only preserve the knowledge of God in as much as both his exterior being, his body, his power, is joined for this common end to his interior being, his intellect, his will. There is, here, the notion that the harmony between the different parts of Man's being is a prerequisite condition for the undertaking of theology as a human activity. Religion, therefore, manifests itself in an interior or spiritual way in adoration, and in an exterior or corporal way in public worship. What maintains, or rather, what impels Man to maintain and preserve religion, or keep God present to his mind, is his love for God, which itself, can only be a response of the love of God for man. "*Love*" writes Bonald, "*is thus*

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<sup>124</sup> *Théorie*, p.123.



*neither will, nor power, nor spirit, nor body, but, rather, partakes of both*".<sup>125</sup> Love is what binds the mind, the intellect to the body, and in a formal manner, will to power, the spiritual to the material, in their common directedness towards or desire for an external object. Love, will, power: Bonald insists that those three are distinct yet complementary faculties. In God, these three faculties are infinite, uncreated, united in one act; in Man, finite, created, and each expressed differently. There are, thus, certain relations between God and Man - of uncreated will to created will, of uncreated love to created love, of uncreated power to created power - that are proportionate to the natures of the beings involved, and therefore, are endowed with such a necessary character that they can well be called laws. Thus, these relations form the basis of a community between God and Man, which finds its external expression in public worship and its interior manifestation in adoration. Bonald calls this community "*natural religious society or natural religion*", and defines society as "*the combination of similar beings through such laws or necessary relations as tend towards their mutual generation and preservation*".<sup>126</sup> If such a community exists between such beings as God and Man, it is likely to exist between Man and Man as well. Human beings produce other human beings from the love they bear to one another, and preserve the human beings thus generated out of love for them. This fundamental community of generation is the family, the domestic society.

Yet, while natural religion and the family are, for Bonald, the originary and fundamental societies, they can only imperfectly discharge the duty of preserving their members, or rather, of preserving the relations between their members. This imperfection arises when self-love comes to displace the love of others which is responsible for the preservation of society. Self-love is the principle of generation, but not of preservation. The intrusion of self-love into the conservative action of society is but a violation of the necessary relations underlying it, and effectively nullifies such conservative action: war between human beings is the necessary result of disorders of the will and exclusive self-love. Against human passions, and the obstacle they put in the way of the general preservation of humankind, the necessity for a general society imposes itself.

This is what really matters to Bonald who writes "*Philosophy* [by which he meant the Modern and Enlightenment philosophers] *asks whether the agreement of all those contrary interests was voluntary or imposed. It was neither, replies reason: it was necessary*".<sup>127</sup> A general will,

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<sup>125</sup> *Théorie*, p.124.

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*, p.126.

<sup>127</sup> *Théorie*, p.132.

general love and general force, replacing all particular wills, loves and forces, form together the essence, the constitution of a general society of preservation. Families, then, as domestic societies, will be the constitutive elements of the political society of preservation, while natural religion, in its domestic aspect, will be the constitutive element of public religion. The former is concerned with the preservation of bodies and the latter, with the preservation, and ultimately, the salvation of the souls united to those bodies. Bonald's social philosophy is constructed in a manner to exclude from the constitution of society anything that has to do with self-interest and self-love – on the contrary, the pursuit of self-interests and self-preservation is held to be unable to preserve society. Against Hobbes and Locke, it is crucial to him to attempt at locating the instinct of social preservation in the love of others. It could, indeed, be levelled against Hobbes more so than Locke, perhaps, that the former took little notice of the family as a society, and as a consequence, put forth the idea of a political society that is self-generative, the Leviathan being the sum of the sovereignties of the individual and several humans fighting in asocial state of nature. While it could not be argued with any certainty that Bonald had Hobbes in mind while writing the opening chapters of the *Théorie* (he more likely had Rousseau in mind), it is noteworthy that Hobbes opened the *Leviathan* with a discussion of the nature of Man, whereas Bonald opened his treatise by a discussion of the nature of God.

What we have here in the first few chapters of the *Théorie* is an articulation of what constitutes the object and end of society in terms that transcend society or any other human reality. Mere natural necessity is not to be accepted as axiomatic: there is something over and above this natural necessity that informs and determines it. Bonald delivers a sketch of what he believes to be the theological foundations of society, while rejecting both deism and pantheism, the minimal or diffused deity that found favour with the radical thinkers of the seventeenth and eighteenth century. It is not in terms of a *theologia naturalis* that he rejects those, but in what will effectively amount to a *theologia civilis*. In the preface to the *Théorie*, Bonald points to what he perceives to be Montesquieu's double failure to articulate the first principles of political societies, instead contenting himself with describing their spirit, and to credit the climate, instead of the passions of men, with the variations in the legislations of these societies. What Bonald denounces is the superficiality of the analysis and conclusions of Montesquieu, who, while possessing a wealth of information and an undeniable sagacity, succumbed to the sceptic prejudices of his age and bequeathed to posterity a political science that hardly reaches to the ultimate grounds of political reality. This denunciation will take a particular force in Bonald's later critique of the modern idea of constitution and of the doctrine of the separation of powers.

Bonald, as mentioned above, is not so much interested in the proofs of the existence of God, as in the assumption of this existence as the basis both of the creation of the universe and of political society. He thereby seeks to introduce a causal link between the love of God and the very existence and perpetuation of society. The proximate end of Bonald's tractate on the love of God is both to demonstrate and to justify the derivation of society from this love. Divine self-love is the only legitimate self-love that is also productive of something else, whereas human self-love is not productive, and cannot serve as the principle of any community. Self-love can only be the love of society for itself, seeking its collective self-preservation. The common good can only result from the application of the collective love that society bears towards all its members and from the application of this love by the general will.

## **B. The Constitution of Society**

It is here that we reach the point at which Bonald critically engages with Rousseau's understanding of the general will. He is ready to concede to Rousseau that "*only the general will can direct the powers of the State in such a way that its true purpose, which is the good of all, will be achieved*".<sup>128</sup> What Bonald disputes is that the general will should be identified with the popular will, becoming liable of a voluntarist (and, ultimately, nihilistic) interpretation, and, thus, avoiding any relation to necessity of the general laws of society. The general will, Bonald contends, cannot be the will of the people, for even where that will were unanimous, it would still remain a sum of particular wills<sup>129</sup>. Society is endowed with a constitution that is not for the wills of men to make or unmake: the general will is not the particular will of an assembly, of a people, or even, of a king. To try to rebuild society from first principles, and to legitimate such an exercise by grounding it on a voluntarist notion of general will, is tantamount to make society take an unnatural course. This is what happened, according to Bonald, at the French Revolution, where the general will was conflated with the sum of individual wills, whose end, instead of being the general good, had become the pursuit of individual and factional interests. As a result, French society descended into chaos, anarchy and human misery.

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<sup>128</sup> Jean-Jacques Rousseau. *The Social Contract* (Book II, chapter i) in *Social Contract: Essays by Locke, Hume and Rousseau*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1946, p.269.

<sup>129</sup> Cf. *Théorie*, p.134.

It follows, from Bonald's critique, that the general will is a universal will that obtains in all societies, for it is the will whose principal object is the self-preservation of societies. It proceeds from the very nature of things, of men and of societies. Since it cannot be embodied in the people, in the multiplicity of their wills and interests, however similar, it needs to be vested in one person in a stable and permanent manner. What the French Revolution revealed was that under a democratic or popularist understanding of general will, any faction that comes to power can claim to represent and act in the name of the general will. In other words, the general will becomes a mere device used by a variety of factions to legitimise their rule.

How does Bonald arrive at this fundamental law of the unitary embodiment of the general will? General will, as we have seen earlier, is not the sole element of society – there is also the general love and the general force. The general and fixed laws of society are the expression of how those three faculties relate to one another. Now, on the assumption that society is a being, the general will is its inner self, the general force its exterior self, and the general love, the link between the two. The question is, thus, not solely one of how is the general will manifested and expressed, but also how are the other two faculties manifested and expressed. If the general will cannot be embodied in the people as such, neither can the general love and the general force. It would go against the natural constitution if the general will were embodied in one man, and the two other faculties in the people, or in any combination of the people: *“Thus, love is the nexus, the mediator between the intellectual part and the material part of society, as it is in human beings, and was [embodied in] a man called monarch because, alone he commands, and king, because alone he directs the public force”*.<sup>130</sup> Love being the nexus, it is that faculty whose embodiment implies the embodiment of the other two: the love of others which is the conservative love of society. Therefore, the being of society must be embodied in one concrete person. If there is no such embodiment, there can be no society at all: *“Society, which is not the same as the mere rallying of the people could not predate the monarch: it could not exist before there was a power to make it exist. It is therefore absurd to imagine that society could ever dictate conditions to the monarch”*.<sup>131</sup>

As embodiment of the general will, of the necessary relations of society, indeed, of its laws, and ultimately, of the will of God, the monarch is not the creature and the agent of the people, and does not depend upon their consent to act in a legitimate manner. Furthermore, the embodiment of the three faculties of the social being do not correspond to any tripartite

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<sup>130</sup> *Théorie*, p.139.

<sup>131</sup> *Théorie*, p.139.

separation of powers, that is, the monarch should not be conceived to be the depositary of these three powers that would need to be differentiated subsequently into separate bodies. The monarch is here to ensure that the laws of the political society express the general will, which ever tends to the preservation of society. Embodying the bond of love that keeps society together, he is truly the agent of the general will understood as an emanation of the divine will, itself the expression of divine sovereignty, while the people is at once the instrument and the subject of this will and sovereignty. The affirmation of divine sovereignty in Bonald seeks to be the counterpoint of the affirmation of popular sovereignty that prefaced both the American and French Revolutions (in spite of the vague, deistic invocations prefixed to their respective inceptive Declarations): “*The dogma of popular sovereignty, in overturning this order, and in dethroning God, was naturally bound to lead to atheism*”.<sup>132</sup> To affirm popular sovereignty is tantamount to denying that everything comes from God and is ordained to him as final cause. In God himself, by virtue of his simplicity, the three faculties of will, love and power are joined together in a single and eternal act of being. In man and society, composite beings not endowed with such simplicity, the agreement and synchronicity of these faculties is a matter of constant struggle and adjustment. Under the rule of a will governed by love and using a degree of force, preservation obtains, otherwise chaos emerges. The rule of one is, thus, more conducive to the end of preservation than the rule of the multitude in which equal wills armed with unequal forces never cease to compete, and the course of such competition is eventually bound to lead society to its ruin.

Bonald is the first to recognise that what he describes is an ideal type, a state of perfection, rarely to be found among existing polities, even those that are based upon necessary relations. Even such polities, which he calls *constituted societies*, will, on closer inspection, be found wanting in their conformity to necessary relations. If the members of a political society are bound together by relations that are not necessary, that are not in accordance with their nature, it is to be expected that the laws of such a society will be variable and defective in the extreme. Under those circumstances, laws, instead of being the expression of the inner order of society, and tending towards the preservation of its members, will be incapable of keeping society together for this very end. In such a *non-constituted society*, beings will be produced but not preserved. According to Bonald, the *Philosophes* wanted to turn the clock back to non-constituted societies, expecting to find there the purity and perfection of beginnings; in seeking

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<sup>132</sup> Ibid., p.140.

to do so, they did not see that it would lead society to anarchy. The more constituted a society, the more perfect it will be.

How, then can a society be “*more constituted*”? This seems to imply a scale of “*constitutedness*” among societies. Among necessary relations, some are more important than others. For Bonald, the vertical relations, that is, of power to subject in the political society, of father to children in the domestic family, are more important than horizontal relations between subjects, or between children. As societies tend to become “*more constituted*”, the important relations between their members will be those that are more necessary. Conversely, a society will be less constituted to the extent that the relations between its members will be less necessary, and thus, more horizontal. In a constituted society, the necessary relations provide the basis for the general will to be expressed in fixed and fundamental laws, whereas in non-constituted societies, the non-necessary relations, themselves the result of particular and depraved wills, will yield, as mentioned above, variable and defective laws<sup>133</sup>. The fundamental laws, thus, are those laws that express the constitution of a polity. They are the basis of the political laws which determine the form of government. Political laws express the nature of man and of society. Civil laws, in turn, are derived from political laws, and express those norms that regulate the social life of men among themselves. It is only in a constituted that the general will expresses itself through such a hierarchy of laws<sup>134</sup>.

It appears from the preceding that the Bonaldian notion of a political constitution is one that is based on the three faculties of will, love and force or power, and their organic unity and agreement. He takes the word constitution to mean just that – “*the way in which something is made up, the arrangement or combination of its parts or elements, as determining its nature and character; make, frame, composition*”.<sup>135</sup> The constitution refers to the inner principle of agreement of the three faculties, from which it follows that not all political societies are constituted: for where there is no such agreement, there cannot be a constitution. On the other hand, most societies, especially non-constituted ones, present outward characteristics that correspond to the form of government, and not to the constitution, properly speaking, while in constituted societies the form of government is a direct reflection of the constitution. The difference between the forms of governments of non-constituted society is to be ascribed to the

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<sup>133</sup> Cf. *Théorie*, p.146.

<sup>134</sup> Cf. *Théorie*, p.213.

<sup>135</sup> OED entry for “*Constitution*”, definition 4a: “*constitution, n.*”. OED Online. June 2018. Oxford University Press. <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/39848?redirectedFrom=constitution> (accessed June 12, 2018).

fact that each of those forms is the result of the non-necessary relations and the rule of the particular wills that obtain in such societies. Furthermore, the difference can be narrowed down to the ways in which the particular will is exercised. Thus, there where the particular will of one is sovereign, and the exercise of power personal, the form of the government is despotic. There where the particular will of some is sovereign and the power of some hold society, the form of government is republican. Resorting to military similes, Bonald likens republican democracy to a state of savagery, one in which all wills, powers and forces collide constantly and fight one another, while a pure despotic rule is compared to the state of conquest, where only subsist an absolute ruler and a mass of slaves, ever ready to rebel. It is this non-constituted society that bears the greatest resemblance to Hobbes's state of nature, a state of war of all against all. Political society, on the other hand, is a disciplined and well-ordered army, in which the soldiers are united in the pursuit of a common interest under the leadership of a general, the least negligence in whom results in defeat. Ultimately, it is really nothing but the *"war waged by the good on the bad, and all the life of the former is but a long and perilous campaign"*.<sup>136</sup> Monarchical government, according to Bonald, is but an instantiation of this metaphor, which obtains not only in ethics (the war of the good against the bad), but also in politics.

Notwithstanding the diversity of forms of government, and the depraved human wills behind them, Bonald believed in the perfectibility of societies (or, the perfectibility of Man in society). This belief could sometimes take the usual inevitabilistic tone: *"Non-constituted societies inevitably and invincibly tend to constitute themselves, and constituted societies to become more constituted; that is to say, the legislation of nature tends to destroy the legislation of man, and substitute its own laws or necessary relations for non-necessary ones"*.<sup>137</sup> There is, therefore, in societies a natural tendency towards becoming more constituted, and while this tendency might not lead to an actual change in the form of government, yet, the general will, under the impulse of nature, displaces the particular will or wills and becomes the inner principle of legislation. Revolutions and seditions are the outward manifestations of the interior struggles that attend such a displacement. In other words, all governments, irrespective of their outward form or of the principles professed by the regime, tend towards some monarchical unity of will and force, invested in one person, whether that person is publicly recognised or not.

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<sup>136</sup> *Théorie*, p.149.

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid.*, p.152.

It follows that constitutions can only be natural: they are the expression of the social nature of man. One could not “*write*”, that is, create ex nihilo, a constitution because a constitution is “*very existence and very nature*”.<sup>138</sup> Furthermore, Bonald seems to think that modern legislators, by which he meant those who were in charge of creating the “*constitutions*” of the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, were aware of the absence of any inner constitutive principle in their works,<sup>139</sup> and thus, tried to remedy this absence by putting forth “*preliminary declarations of imaginary rights and pretended duties*”.<sup>140</sup> Beyond the domestic impact of the subterfuges whereby the real constitution and the true nature of revolutions are concealed behind universal declarations of humanity (designed to appeal to the emotions and the passions of the multitude rather than to their reason), the international repercussions of the lack of a constitution cannot be overlooked. Non-constituted societies will tend to be weak, isolated, and violent, and the violence that is inherent in them either devours them up or spreads outside their borders. Bonald here agrees with Montesquieu, quoting him, that “*republics must [always] have something to dread*”.<sup>141</sup> It is by virtue of this fear and of the need to wage wars that non-constituted societies live in constant dependence of other states, whether they be allies or enemies. The principle of their very preservation is to be found outside of themselves. Ideally, the international system would be a collection of constituted states bound by commercial and friendly bonds, and all subscribing to the same fundamental laws. Revolutionary and Napoleonic France was constantly involved in wars, waged, it would seem, to defend the “*Nation*”, the principles of 1789, and extend “*liberty*” to Europe, that is to say, to destroy or subdue the continental monarchies. Those wars could also be seen as the attempt to export the violence that was then stirring the bosom of France, together with the ideas that would eventually inspire and drive European and colonial politics for much of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and beyond.

### C. Civil Society

While Bonald uses the word “*political society*” quite consistently throughout his works to designate what we may call the “*state*”, he does not thereby mean the entirety of the public organisation of society. Instead, he uses the expression “*civil society*” to designate a more

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<sup>138</sup> Ibid., p.214.

<sup>139</sup> Cf. *Théorie*, p.214: “*To write the constitution is to overturn it, just as to decree the existence of the Supreme Being amounts to negate faith in Him*”.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid., p.153.

<sup>141</sup> Cf. Montesquieu, *The Spirit of the Laws*, VIII.5.



comprehensive entity that encompasses not only the political society but also the religious one. Man is both body and soul; the aim of the political society is the preservation of the body, while that of the religious society is the preservation of the soul. The public or civil sphere, properly speaking, must accommodate not only political ends, but also religious ends, on account of the nature of Man, both physical and spiritual. We saw earlier that God and Man were already bound in a society, by virtue of Man's creaturely similarity to God. If God is thus related to every individual Man, he is also related to the bodies of Men that form societies. And this relation, being an "*intellectual*", that is, spiritual, communion of God with the social body is also a necessary one, in other words, for Bonald, an incontrovertible one. The relation manifests itself through religious laws, and in public worship the recognition of its universal character is expressed; together they form public religion. As much as monarchy expresses the unitary constitution of political power, so does the public religion express both the unity of God and his relation with society, and no alleged act of popular sovereignty could ever release a people from the obligation to conform to the natural constitution of civil society. In both branches of the civil society, then, there must be permanent agencies that are ordained to the pursuance and application of the general will, whether it be for the good of Men's bodies and physical being, or for their souls. Those permanent agencies, occupying the intermediate degree in the hierarchy, are to be differentiated from the people; they constitute a distinct class whose sole function is to be the agents of the unitary power, whether that of God or of Man. There are thus three fundamental laws or normative notes or characteristics of a civil society: unitary power, permanent social distinctions and public religion. In civil society, as Bonald understands it, the society of Man with his fellows, and the society of God with Man are harmoniously brought together, forming an organic whole that allows for the integral enactment of an authentic human life by encompassing both the concerns of the body and of the soul, and an authentic human life is one that is led in conformity with the laws or necessary relations dictated by nature, and, ultimately, God.

Throughout his disquisitions on civil society, Bonald reminds us that "*there where all men necessarily want to rule with equal wills and unequal forces, it is necessary that one man rules or that all destroy themselves*".<sup>142</sup> The equal wills derive from a common human nature while the unequal forces are due to the historical circumstances wherein a society and its members are to be found. All men want to rule, but not all are entitled or, indeed, able to do so. The

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<sup>142</sup> *Théorie*, p.160.

desire to rule is something that is bound up with the moral constitution of men, whereas the question of what means they have at their disposal is a primarily social one. In other words, there needs to be an adequation of Man's interior motives with his exterior acts. Bonald, in his formulation of the dual constitution of civil society, attempts precisely to articulate this adequation. The task of the religious society, of public religion, even considered as a *form of government*,<sup>143</sup> is to help Man overcome his depraved will through a disciplined cultivation and refinement of interior motives, and thus prevent exterior acts that are detrimental to society while that of the political society aims at making the depraved will impotent by repressing exterior acts similarly detrimental. "*The identity of objects intrinsic to both societies manifests itself by an identity of effects*"<sup>144</sup>: if the action of one weakens, the action of the other will weaken as well. Once a change in the constitution of the one is introduced, the social effect of the other will change accordingly, by virtue of their concurrent action on Man.

Here again, Bonald is convinced that this harmonious combination of the means, effects and ends of public religion with those of the political authority can be instantiated only where the unity of God and the unity of the social power are recognised together simultaneously as the twin foundations of civil society. Drawing from his own reading of ancient history, Bonald seeks to find instances that vindicate his theory of the union of religious and political power, and, more importantly, of the primacy of religious power within civil society<sup>145</sup>. In the history of ancient Hebrews, he finds the example of a people who was able to preserve itself on the sole basis of a religious constitution that was grounded upon the unity of the Godhead, whereas the Egyptians only possessed a political constitution, however laden with religious symbols, that did not protect them from Greek and Roman domination, and from the admixture of their own beliefs with those of their conquerors. It was, thus, significantly providential that the accomplishment of the Jewish religion in Jesus Christ should happen at the same time as the establishment of the unity of power over a substantial part of the world by the Roman principate. On the other hand, it was in ancient Athens, according to Bonald, noting that as the twin emergence of democracy and atheism occurred at the same time, from then on, the two principles of religious and political nihilism became inseparable in his reading of history. One cannot help reflecting here upon the peculiarities of Bonald's historical demonstration<sup>146</sup>,

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<sup>143</sup> The 5<sup>th</sup> Chapter of Book I of the *Théorie* is entitled "*Religion publique, forme de gouvernement*".

<sup>144</sup> *Ibid.*, p.161.

<sup>145</sup> *Théorie*, pp.164-167.

<sup>146</sup> Cf. Alfred Cobban's review of Mary Hall Quinlan's book, in *The English Historical Review*, Vol.69, No.272 (July 1954), pp.492-493.

especially when it comes to ancient history, which are no doubt due to the vagaries his exile in Germany and to an almost exclusive reliance Bossuet's philosophy of history. What our author here seeks to do is to contend that it was only in Christendom that public religion and political power were ever recognised to be distinct yet conjoined, and thus, only in Christendom, was an authentic civil society ever to be found. His use, primarily didactic, of historical examples is ordained to his critique of the present, of the excesses of the French Revolution, whose agents, in his analysis, have been pursuing a consistent policy of the destruction of civil society in France. We must not forget at this point, that Bonald became finally disillusioned with the reforming pretensions of the early revolutionaries with the passing of the Civil Constitution of the Clergy<sup>147</sup>, whereby they tried to absorb the Church into the revolutionary settlement that was being put in place. This absorption and subsequent neutralisation of the once powerful Church of France would pave the way for the excesses of the next phase of the revolution. By, then, seeking to abolish the public recognition of the unity of God as revealed in the Christian religion, the revolutionaries of the Terror have but led France back into a state of savagery, that is, a pre-civil, or more correctly, an uncivil state, and had thrown it into a state of war with all other European nations.

The latent or manifest atheism, often conveniently presented as a deism, that was ingrained in the revolutionary beliefs did not so indicate the absence of recognition of God in public society as much as it led to the establishment of a multiplicity of gods or idols, in other words, the substitution of religion for the pursuit of disordered passions: "*The most impure idolatry is reared next to the most ferocious despotism*".<sup>148</sup> Peace at home and abroad can only be the achievement of a truly civil society, in which the laws are obeyed and the passions kept under check. Polytheism, or atheism negating God's oneness, and democracy and other popular regime denying the unity of social power can only combine to initiate the eventual dissolution of society. We have here in Bonald a classic explanation of the necessary alliance of altar and throne where the microcosmic and moral unity of soul and body in human beings corresponds to the necessary moral and social union of public religion with political power.

Civil society is characterised by the perpetuity of the means of its own conservation. Underlying the three fundamental laws of civil society is the notion of the perpetuity or continuity: this is the meaning of conservation, namely, maintenance in accordance with

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<sup>147</sup> Cf. the previous chapter.

<sup>148</sup> *Théorie*, p.169.

specific laws that are already found in society itself. One such law or principle that allows the continuity of society is heredity. The general will, concerned with the conservation of society, required that the exercise of power should never be interrupted, and “*the monarch could only be perpetual through the hereditary transmission of power in one family*”.<sup>149</sup> The principle of an election would interfere with the unbroken transmission, or, indeed, succession, required for the preservation of society; the case of Poland, with its elective monarchy and its subsequent misfortunes, furnished Bonald for the evidence of the inadequacy of the elective principle. Society is primarily a reunion of families, not of individuals, and thus, it is in families that the functions essential for the survival of society ought to reside. In his *Pensées sur l'économie sociale*,<sup>150</sup> he stressed the relationship between family, society and the state in the striking formula: “*the heredity of the throne is the guarantee of all heredities, and the safeguard of all inheritances*”.

Again, we cannot sufficiently stress that the conservation of society means primarily for Bonald the conservation of families, which themselves are dedicated to the conservation of their own members. But it is not only the monarchy that is to be invested in one family and be perpetuated in a dynasty. The same holds true for those ministers that serve the monarchy and help it in its conservative functions and duties. Heredity, thus, helps preserve the public ministry, whether political or religious, from the passions of either the despots or of the subjects, and, through their action, preserves society from revolutions. These can only happen, it follows, in the case of severe dereliction of duty on the part of the public ministry or of its destruction through terror and war. The dereliction of duty happens when the public ministry ceases to seek to implement the general will, and instead makes itself the vehicle of particular wills. For Bonald, society perishes through the passions being unfettered and unschooled, and publicly promoted, as it were. In such a situation, the passions of the man occupying the throne who seeks to rule not by the general will, but by his own particular private will, will inevitably affect the order of society, and lead to troubles. He describes such a state of affairs as oppression: the effect on society of the depraved particular will of one man or of a group of men, who dispose of public means to enact such a will<sup>151</sup>.

The question, then, is posed: how is oppression to be prevented and contained in a constituted and civil state of society? In such a society, the opposition to oppression ought not to come

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<sup>149</sup> *Théorie*, pp.174-175.

<sup>150</sup> Cf. *Oeuvres Complètes*, Migne. Ed. Col.1291.

<sup>151</sup> *Théorie*, pp.180-189, the whole of the 7th Chapter of Book 1.

primarily through the mass of the people, or through individual members of the public. Instead, one should look for the structural means of resistance present in the system itself. What is crucial here is the distinction, alluded to in the preceding paragraphs, between the personal will of the monarch as a private person and the general will of the monarch as the incarnation of public authority and power. The monarch in the latter capacity cannot, by definition, violate the fundamental laws of society or the civil laws of the polity, given that he is, himself, a "*living law*". The difficulty lies in ascertaining the situations during which the monarch will try to substitute his own private will for the public and general will. The monarch himself cannot be counted upon to make such distinctions, which Bonald ascribes to the simultaneity and inseparability of private man and public power in the person of the monarch. Should he be called upon to adjudicate upon such a distinction, it is not certain whether his adjudication would be impartial, and free from his own disordered private will to power. There should be a body of public servants whose tasks it is both to make such distinctions between private will and public will. The necessity for making such distinctions will itself arise when the same public servants will be called upon to execute the decisions of the general will. The task of these public servants or ministers will be to transmit and certify the decisions of the monarch as public power. These ministers in turn ought to be responsible to those courts and tribunals that are entrusted with the defence and interpretation of laws. The custody and the interpretation of laws are, therefore, to be vested in some body other than the monarch, in the case, that the latter, as private person should decide to modify the laws for his own personal benefit. Only a body made up of many members, too numerous to be seduced as a whole, and powerful enough to resist the threats and cajoleries of a corrupt power, is to be entrusted with the keeping of the laws. The members of this body ought to be free from the influence and power of any particular will, whether it be of the private person of the monarch, or of the members of society. Bonald here opines that the ills of France, probably the ills that lead to the Revolution and that attended it, were in no small part due to the fact that it became customary for the ministers of the crown to accept and execute the private will of the monarch. For him, the ministers of the monarch are to be responsible to that independent body, entrusted within the polity with the interpretation of the general will and of the fundamental laws, expressed in civil laws. If the monarch as public power is himself "*living law*", as a private person he is bound and subject to all laws, except to criminal laws. This is so precisely by reason of the union of the public person of the monarch with his private person. To bring criminal charges against the monarch, king and man, amounts to bringing charges against the supreme public authority in the polity, which is an impossibility because every judicial act in the polity proceeds from the supreme

public authority, whose end is the conservation of society. Now, if and when, the supreme public authority appears to be taking measures that seem to compromise this end, it can only be because, in his person, at once king and man, his private will has prevailed over the general will, who then, as a private uses the public force of society for his own private ends. This, he could not do without the assent, however servile and unfree, of his ministers. The monarch depends upon them to effect his desire to apply the public force of society to the furtherance of his private ends. Their responsibility is, therefore, easier to locate, to identify and to question, than that of the monarch. The monarch, as supreme public authority, is not responsible to anyone or any particular body in the polity, because he alone embodies the general will, and the general will cannot be judged by the particular wills of the members of the polity.

In order for all, that is, the monarch, the ministers of religion, the ministers of the public authority, and the mass of citizens, to perform their respective duties within civil society, they must be free from the hindrance of particular wills. All orders in society, as public bodies within the polity, must be conformed to the general will, and this can only happen if they are free from the influence and power of particular wills. Freedom from oppression is, then, truly freedom from particular wills. Similarly, equality is really the equal submission of all to the laws of society.

From the three fundamental laws or notes of all civil societies, and from the attempt to understand the constitution of the civil society in terms of the general will, Bonald derives twelve *political laws* that characterise all monarchies: 1. The intervention of religion in all social actions; 2. Public education, which comprises both of religious and political education; 3. The independence of religion and of its ministers from all particular wills; 4. The exercise of power is to be fixed by heredity; 5. The personal independence of the monarch; 6. The perpetuity of the military profession is also to be fixed by heredity; 7. The independence of the public force, or military profession, from all particular wills; 8. The establishment of tribunals in whom the custody of laws is to be vested; 9. The independence of these tribunals from all particular wills; 10. The nomination of the agents of the public power, that is, of ministers; 11. The responsibility of ministers before the abovementioned tribunals; 12. The independence of all social professions, ensured by the inamovibility of their members<sup>152</sup>.

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<sup>152</sup> Cf. *Théorie*, p.190.

These political laws of a constituted monarchical polity that is coterminous with what Bonald deems to be a genuine civil society could be seen as mere formalisations of certain features of the *Ancien Régime*. Indeed, the clear distinction between the orders of society and the social professions, their respective functions in the polity and the mode of their membership do harken back to the positions occupied by the Church of France, the military and the magistracy, together with the agents or ministers of the monarchy. But Bonald is not limiting himself to justifying a now defunct system; instead, with his appropriation of the trope of the general will and his re-interpretation thereof, he is offering a model of society, with all the characteristics of the past regime, into which the criticisms of the Enlightenment have been answered, and to a degree, for Bonald, neutered. In appropriating the notion of the general will, Bonald was opposing the secularised jusnaturalist tradition that had become prevalent from the Renaissance onwards. The theological nature of this re-interpretation is unmistakable from the very first chapters of the *Théorie*, whose doctrine is but an application of a few primary theological principles to the social nature of man and to the nature of society. The merits of Bonald's theological re-appropriation and re-interpretation will form the subject of another chapter. For now, the task at hand is to continue to survey the main characteristics of his social philosophy and to give an account of a crucial theme that runs throughout his work.





## Chapter 3

### The Developments of the Bonald's Social Philosophy

#### A. Power, Minister and Subject

In the works following the *Théorie*, Bonald will maintain and expand upon his doctrine of the ternary structure of society. In the *Théorie*, this doctrine, as seen in the first section of this chapter, is first introduced in a series of deductions accounting for the inner life of God, the motives of creation, and the nature of creation, including that of man and of society. There, the structure of society is explained in terms of will, power and force. The power in society is the agent of the sovereignty of God while the public force, in turn, is the agent of the public power. In the *Essai Analytique*, Bonald seems intent to re-articulate these philosophical faculties of will, power and force into the more juridical notion of social persons. Every society, then, “*is composed of three persons, distinct from one another, that can be called social persons, namely, power, minister, and subject, who receive different names in the different states of society: father, mother, children, in the domestic society; God, the clergy, the laity, in the religious society; kings or supreme chiefs, nobles or public functionaries, tenants or the people...*”<sup>153</sup> According to Henri Moulinié, in the *Essai Analytique* Bonald moves the focus of his analysis from what is innermost and truly profound in the social organism, that is, from the very soul of society towards its external and visible manifestation<sup>154</sup>. This is also evident in his use throughout the Essay of method of inquiry that is at once inductive and historical. But this not the only change or movement in Bonald's method and system that will also characterise the rest of his oeuvre. In the rest of the sentence just quoted, he goes on to imply a deep connection or correspondence between the three social persons and the three grammatical persons expressed in the personal pronouns (“*I, We, etc.,*”, “*Thou, You*”, “*He, She, They, etc.*”). Through the use of grammatical pronouns, the intelligent (in this context, human) being expresses his actions with respect to himself and to others, for, Bonald continues, “*...it is natural that the fundamental rules of his expression or of his speech should be found in society, inasmuch as the essential reason for his being is to be found also*”. This enquiry into the relations between language and society will from now onwards accompany and, in a sense, inform Bonald's studies on society and politics. This attention to language and to the use of

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<sup>153</sup> *Essai Analytique sur les lois naturelles de l'ordre social, ou du pouvoir, du ministre et du sujet dans la société* (originally published in 1800; our edition, as of the *Législation Primitive*, is that of the *Œuvres du Vicomte de Bonald* published by the Société Nationale Pour la Propagation des Bons Livres, Brussels, 1845, p.5.

<sup>154</sup> Henri Moulinié. *De Bonald: La Vie – La Carrière – La Doctrine*. Paris: Librairie Felix Alcan, 1916, p.285.

words that was already present in the *Théorie* and his other early works now starts to take a more systematic turn that will culminate in the *Recherches Philosophiques* (1818) the analysis of which will form a substantial part of the following chapter.

It is now not so much a question of whether the public power is vested with the duty to preserve society as of how this duty is to be fulfilled. Bonald's answer is that it is through the application of the twin powers of willing and acting that society is preserved. The public power expresses the general will in the making of laws, while public action is the execution of the laws thus made. It is through legislating and governing that society is preserved. But the public or social action it itself divided into two equally crucial functions, namely, judging and fighting. Those two functions are truly general and public functions, comprehending all other particular social functions. Judging consists in ascertaining the stipulations of the general will expressed in laws, while fighting consists in removing all those things that hinder the execution of laws. This function of fighting can be applied both within the polity and outside of its boundaries. These functions are to be exercised by a determined body of public functionaries. They are to be distinguished from the ministers charged by the public power to conduct and direct some aspect or other of public policy and administration. The public functionaries Bonald has in mind are to be divided between the judiciary and the military. Unlike those in charge of public policy, these two bodies are most directly invested with the application of the conservative action of society upon the subject, and thus, are more appropriately, called "*public ministry*".<sup>155</sup>

In the ternary structure of the *Théorie*, the three terms are will, power and force, which correspond to God, king, and public ministry respectively. In the *Essai Analytique*, God is not forthrightly a term of the ternary structure anymore. His existence and presence is tacit in the public power and the necessary relation of the latter to the general will. The subject is now introduced as an element of the ternary structure, for it is for the sake and the benefit of the subject that the general will is deployed in laws and in their execution. It could be argued that the ternary structure Bonald articulated in the *Théorie* pertained to sovereignty and its means, while that put forth in the *Essai Analytique* seeks to account for society as a whole.

Bonald's inclusion of the subject in his structure of society, while it does make perfect sense in the light of the development of his own system, is also not devoid of direct polemical intent. For he does mention the Abbé Sieyès's famous pamphlet "*What is the Third Estate?*" in the

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<sup>155</sup> *Essai Analytique*, pp.6-7.

second paragraph of the preliminary discourse of the *Essai Analytique*. Bonald contrasts his aims in this work with that of Sieyès's: the latter in his pamphlet announced that the revolution was imminent, whereas he, Bonald, was announcing its end. He opines that while the subject always starts a revolution, the public power always ends it. Against Sieyès's identification of society to the mass of subjects, Bonald opposes his threefold unity of the social persons. The motif of the analogy between the divine and the social has not entirely disappeared from Bonald's thought, who at one point uses the word "*trinity*"<sup>156</sup> to refer to the indissoluble unity of the three social persons, without which society could not be conceived. Again, the stress remains on the conservative action of the public power that aims at protecting man, as subject to the general and public will, from the errors of his will and from the tyranny of his passions. It is only then that he can be made to enjoy with a genuine freedom that agrees with the end of his nature. Bonald was convinced that in order to be good, man needs to be enlightened in his will and guided in his actions, which leads him to a paradox, namely, that for man to be free he must be a subject. The subjecthood of man in society is not antithetical to freedom rightly understood. Man is born in chains and must be made free. The chains are primarily moral ones: man is born captive of his passions. It is not the law that must take man's imperfections into account; rather, the law must itself be the supreme and inflexible rule of man's wills and of his actions, given to him so that "*its strength may sustain his weakness, and its rectitude may correct his inclinations*".<sup>157</sup> Weak laws only suit those societies that are at an early stage of their history. The strength of laws is proportionate to their age: in an historical advanced society, relations between men multiply leading to an increase in duties and obligations. The ever-present temptation to fall into the anarchic rule of the passions is to be treated even more seriously at such a stage of society in that its outbreak may threaten the whole social fabric. Yet, while revolutions are, indeed, great scandals and constitute a most existential threat for societies, they may also be the providential occasions for the regeneration of the latter. Thus, subjects start revolutions but do not direct them. There where the public power is powerless to repress human passions, revolutions, through the trials they entail, may even help in leading the subjects to their natural perfection.<sup>158</sup>

As man's inner struggle with the passions inevitably spills into the socio-political sphere, so it is with the inner struggle between truths (especially, moral and social) and errors. For society

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<sup>156</sup> *Essai Analytique*, p.8.

<sup>157</sup> *Essai Analytique*, pp.9,11.

<sup>158</sup> *Ibid.*

*“is a true state of war, of virtue against error, of good against evil, of nature, that desires the communion of all, against man, who tends to isolate himself from all society”*.<sup>159</sup> While the origins of revolutions are to be found in the existing ills of society, the result of the momentary victory of the passions, or even, vice, and error, the end of revolutions may well be accompanied by the manifestation and vindication of virtue and truth. It is not clear whether Bonald thought that this aspect of revolutions was an infallible rule or a probable tendency. But what is remarkable is that, once more, he takes up a fashionable trope of the Enlightenment, namely, the natural perfectibility of man without the aid of divine grace, and seeks to correct it by replacing it in its necessary socio-theological context.

### ***B. Sovereignty between theism and atheism***

Bonald pursues this theological interpretation of politics by comparing the respective applications of atheism, deism and theism to one of the central concerns of modern political philosophy, namely, sovereignty. His approach is to start with what he deems to be observable anthropological facts, which are likely to be agreed by both atheists and theists. Man has a power over himself that is not tied to any animal necessity of his nature, in other, he is endowed with the free will to dispose of himself according to the stipulations of his own inner counsels. It is this power, when not perverted by the passions, which makes all men truly free and equal. No other man can remove this power a man has over himself, unless he reduced him to complete and abject slavery. It is this power, therefore, which *“constitutes human dignity”*.<sup>160</sup> Free will and free action seems to be the characteristics proper to a free man. It seems also that actions proceed from the will as its effects, while the will determine actions as their cause. The will itself and the process of willing are abstract and only have images attached to them insofar as these are images of their actions or effects. Nature offers to the senses a multitude of sensitive effects, that must have been imagined, *“designed”*. These effects seem to bear all the characteristics of a universal action of incommensurate immensity, which Bonald calls *“universe”*, which can only be the result of the application of *“a powerful and universal will, the primary cause of all these effects”*.<sup>161</sup> Theism, for Bonald, starts from the contemplation of the realm of effects and ascends into the realm of causes. The first cause is *ideated*<sup>162</sup> from the

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<sup>159</sup> Ibid., p.19.

<sup>160</sup> *Essai Analytique*, p.24.

<sup>161</sup> Ibid., p.25.

<sup>162</sup> Literal translation and equivalence, e.g. Bonald uses expressions such as *“on idée la cause”* on p.25. To ideate is to form an idea.

ordered multiplicity of its effects. Through this method of analogical induction, the existence of a cause is inferred from the observation of effects. This is the step that atheists, according to Bonald, refuse to take. They deny the cogency of any inductive reasoning that, starting from the world of material perception, would conclude to the existence of a creator of such a world. While they do not deny the existence of actions and effects in nature, they do not acknowledge that these must derive necessarily from a will that is also a first cause. A word does not necessarily correspond to an object: to say “*cause*” or for men to have said “*cause*” does not mean that there is such a thing, an object that exists independently of (that is, ontologically separate from) that which it is supposed to cause. This leads Bonald to claim that atheists only acknowledge that whose image they perceive or sense. To the empiricism of these atheists, he seeks to oppose an ideal realism<sup>163</sup>.

In Bonald’s understanding, as much as theists derive a supreme will from the observable facts of cosmic order, in a similar way, they derive the existence of a sovereign will, of a cause, from the observation of the general laws of society that tend towards the preservation of beings. For the Bonaldian theist, there is, then, a necessary identity between the cause of the universe and the cause of society. The one supreme cause of the universe is also the one supreme cause of society, and all public power proceeds from it. Both the universe and society, as effects, testify to the sovereignty of God. That there might well be atheists who reject popular sovereignty or theists who deny divine sovereignty is only to be explained by men’s lack of logical coherence. Deists are those, who while recognising the existence of a primary cause, do not believe that the human mind could conclude to its existence from the order of the universe, or that the cause could ever intervene directly in the universe or in society. Returning to the dichotomy between theists and atheists, Bonald compares their diverging views by using similes. Theism places supreme power over men in society outside of these very men, similar to an Archimedean lever that would move the world from the outside. Again, the underlying assumption being that men, left to their own devices, cannot be relied upon to discipline themselves. Atheists, in vesting sovereignty in the subject, seem rather to expect that the dam (that is, the power that restrains passions and preserves society) itself will grow out of the torrent it is meant to contain. Bonald argues that this political atheism comes from mistaking society, that is, civil society for a commercial association, which, unlike the former, is always a voluntary and contingent association. This confusion comes from the confusion of man, of his being, with his

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<sup>163</sup> Cf. the whole of the second chapter of the *Essai Analytique*.

commercial interests: it is comparable to a confusion between being and its properties, between the auxiliary verbs “to be” and “to have”.<sup>164</sup> In the *Législation Primitive*, he highlights the difference between the two auxiliary verbs in order to stress the radical difference between the two types of society. “To be” expresses action and pertains to causes, that is, to sovereignty, whereas “to have” expresses passivity and pertains to effects, that is, to causes<sup>165</sup>. The premise of the atheist doctrine of popular sovereignty is a fundamental confusion between cause and effect, sovereignty and subjects. That all men have an interest in the preservation of society does not require they all men enjoy political sovereignty. Man’s will, under the rule of his passions, may very well interfere with the rational appraisal of this essential interest and substitute its own desires for the realisation of the common good and preservation. If man has no rule other than that of his own reason, when that reason fails, he stands little chance of improvement.

### C. Mediation, or the true nature of power

For Bonald, man is, indeed, not left to his own devices. He does not exist in a world where he is faced inexorably, together with his responsibility and obligations, with God’s immutable laws and order. The subjecthood of man, it bears repeating, is not a slavery to the blind fate ordained by a distant deity. It is a regimen of discipline whereby man’s sense of duty, commensurate with, and ever ordained to the end of the preservation of society, is nurtured and perfected. Man’s inner sense and desire for order, while in itself, noble, cannot be relied upon, and is liable to fall under the lure of passions and the spell of enthusiasm. Nor does God impart to every man the knowledge of his moral duties and obligations by a direct verbal revelation. There needs to be an external and visible person in society, “a visible authority that writes and speaks”,<sup>166</sup> that would communicate the truths of God’s order to man and enforce them. God, being a spiritual and simple being, cannot communicate with men immediately, or rather, he chooses to communicate himself, according to the laws that he himself has ordained, and not according to any arbitrary act of his will. It is crucial to note here, that for Bonald, God’s communication with men only happens through his *potentia ordinata*, not through the *potentia*

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<sup>164</sup> *Essai Analytique*, pp.30-32.

<sup>165</sup> *Législation Primitive*, in *Œuvres du Vicomte de Bonald* published by the Société nationale pour la propagation des bons livres, Brussels, 1845, p.294.

<sup>166</sup> *Essai Analytique*, p.35.

*absoluta*. Legitimate authority always acts according to the law; even exceptions to the law take the form of laws.

Given that men must be able to see, or at the very least, to hear the ordinances of morality and of the social order, the authority that speaks and acts in the name of divine sovereignty is truly the power in and over society, and the mediator between God and men in society. The public power in society is thus truly the minister of the sovereign divine action of preservation. Even in societies organised upon the principle of popular sovereignty, there needs to be an agent of the people, who is different from the mere ministers. This public power is, thus, the executive power, whose function it is to execute the legislative will of the sovereign, be it God or the people. Not only is the executive power to be found in all forms of societies, Bonald even suggests as a fact that such a power is almost invariably unitary, always vested in one person, whose proclaims the legislative will and who remains in charge of the social action<sup>167</sup>. It is a person in whom the ultimate *decisionary* power lies. Even in the legislative organs of democracies, the ability to propose a law is usually confined to one person, who does so either as an individual or in the name of a faction. A multiplicity of mediators can only serve to weaken and hinder the executionary duties that are essential to the public power.

The public power mediates between the sovereign and the subjects in order to unite them, to make the subjects' wills conformable to the sovereign will, and thus, communicate to it the conservative action of the sovereign. The public power is the intermediary, the mean between the sovereign and the subject. And as such, it participates of the natures of both: there is in the public power both a perpetual element, comparable to divinity, and a transient element of mortality. The truth of this mediatory nature of public power is more readily recognisable in the Church, where the power himself, that is, Jesus Christ, partakes of both the divine and the human natures<sup>168</sup>.

Against Rousseau, Bonald maintains that the power in society, that is, the mediation, or personified in the mediator, is not the result of a contract between the sovereign and the subjects, nor is it subject to their consent<sup>169</sup>. It is not so much matter of the subjects'

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<sup>167</sup> *Essai Analytique*, p.41.

<sup>168</sup> *Essai Analytique*, p.46. This is, indeed, in its barest elements, already a theory of the monarch's "*two bodies*".

<sup>169</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.51-53.

(disordered) will as one of the necessary laws of nature, in the same sense, that there can be no social compact between the parents and the children. Nor is there a social compact in the religious society between God and man- the covenants of the Old and New Testaments not being contracts between equals. No contract can ever take place before the institution of the public power, because society could not exist without a public power. And should this pre-social and pre-political institution of power even be granted, the decision to gather all men and to deliberate on such a matter could always be traced back to one person, who, being listened to, must necessarily have disposed of some authority. Power precedes society and constitutes it, the reverse would be illogical and untrue.

In the *Législation Primitive*, Bonald seeks to formalise this notion of mediation in re-articulating the ternary structure of society as that of cause, mean, and effect<sup>170</sup>. As much as the power in society is the mediator between the sovereign God and the subjects, so is the ministry the mediator between the public power and the subjects. The ministry is the agent of the power as much as the power is the agent of the sovereign. And it is through this chain of command that the principle of the preservation of society is communicated and applied to the members of society. Relations between the social persons are proportional each to their respective functions and ends, and the similarities and differences between the intricately interconnected levels of organisation are also proportional to the nature of the causes and effects at the different levels.

#### **D. The Bonaldian Political Summa**

In his last political treatise, *Démonstration philosophique des principes constitutifs de la société*<sup>171</sup> (hereinafter *Démonstration*) published in 1830, Bonald endeavours to sum up his whole political philosophy, developed throughout his entire oeuvre, while at the same time bequeathing us his last word on the relation between the political and the theological. The *Démonstration* is truly the synthesis of his entire system, taking the themes he introduced and developed in all his former political tractates. This time, his starting point is the family. The inquiry starts from a considering of the domestic family to arrive at an exposition of the principles governing political society. The importance of speech as the originary and primary

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<sup>170</sup> *Législation Primitive*, pp.317-320.

<sup>171</sup> *Démonstration philosophique des principes constitutifs de la société*. Librairie Adrien Le Clere, Paris, edition of 1875.



means of the preservation of society is stressed (this is in deep connection with his theory of primitive revelation, discussed in the next chapter).

As in his former works, Bonald here seeks to imagine the beginnings of the public state of society as distinguished from the domestic or the religious. The need to refute the claims of contractarians is also present. It is not the state of nature that precedes the public state of society, rather, it is the loose and diffuse state of domestic societies, bound by natural and customary laws. And the establishment of the public power is not the result of agreement, contract or consent, nor yet, of conquest. No doubt an element of recognition is involved, but it is the recognition of something that pre-exists and that has been manifested. That the “*rite of recognition*” in the order of coronation of monarch could have been mistaken for a rite of consent and contract and have presented the contractarians with evidence for their doctrine is understandable<sup>172</sup>. For the power, if not agreed upon contractually, if not created by contract, is manifested in situations of necessity, where the coordination of all families is crucial for their survival. The need for an overarching arbitration over the families’ disputes regarding (scarce) resources, the need for leadership in moments of natural and human calamities, the need for a class of men whose sole function would be the support of the leadership in its function of preservation, all together explain the origins of the public society<sup>173</sup>. It is doubtless an argument from nature and necessity that is tinged with a strain of providentialism, or, indeed, of the providential election of the public power. This providential dispensation, that is also the founding event of the political, is truly an act of divine sovereignty while the formal-historical conditions of security and safety, implicit in such a dispensation, precede and inform the establishment of the public state of society.

The founding act of the public state of society is a divine act, or partakes of a divine act, though this is not always evident. It is only through such an act that France could have been uplifted from the abject state of anarchy brought about during the revolutionary period: “*When Bonaparte appeared, France was not a society*”.<sup>174</sup> Bonaparte was the providential man who reintroduced the principle of monarchy, and, in doing so, re-founded society. And the succession to the imperial monarchy would have been settled in his heirs and his family, if

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<sup>172</sup> See, for example, Sid Ray. *Holy Estates: Marriage and Monarchy in Shakespeare and His Contemporaries*. Susquehanna University Press: Selinsgrove 2004, pp.112-113.

<sup>173</sup> *Démonstration*, p.459.

<sup>174</sup> *Ibid.*, p.461.

providence had not again intervened, brought him low through defeats, and thus recalled the legitimate family to the throne. In ancient times, people did not always understand the relation between divine sovereignty and the emergence of providential men, often making the latter, as founders and legislators, the offspring of their gods.

### **i. The Properties of the Public Power in Society**

The formation and preservation of the public state of society requires that the public power be vested with certain properties, without which it could not possibly function. Bonald proceeds here to expand upon the general laws of political society already set forth in the *Théorie* (see previous chapter). The public power is to be unitary, that is, it has to be vested in one person. The reason political power causes so many divisions and contentions amongst men is precisely because its possession and exercise cannot really be shared. Though its exercise can, indeed, be momentarily delegated to a multiplicity of agents by virtue of its many functions, it is essentially unitary. If there happen to be two powers within a society, it means there is not one society, but two. The analogy can be extended either to the domestic society (no two fathers in one family – the power of which shares the same properties as those of the power of public society) or to religion (monotheism). The competition and fight between parties and factions further testify to this unitary nature, for all desire the same thing.

The public power must also be independent, for a power that were dependent upon another would cease, by the very fact, to be a power. Here, Bonald quotes Hobbes with approval: “*Summum esse, et aliis subjici, contradictoria sunt*”,<sup>175</sup> that is, it is a contradiction to be at once power and subject. It is from this position of independence, material and legal, that the power can fulfil its duties. Thus, the public power cannot be independent if it is not also the major landowner of the country, if it does cannot dispose freely of such resources that are essential in the duty of preservation.

The public power is not truly independent if it is not also final. Its decisions and ordinances must be final and command genuine obedience. Appeals against its decrees (which are presumed to be according to the general laws of society) cannot be tolerated. In this sense, it is

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<sup>175</sup> The quotation is from *De Cive*, 13.2, found in the second volume of the Latin edition of the philosophical works of Hobbes published by Sir William Molesworth, London: Johannes Bohn, p.293. In the translation of 1651, it is rendered as follows “*to be chief, and subject, are contradictories*”.

an absolute power. Bonald maintains that absolute is not synonymous with arbitrary. One can only guess who were the “*ignorant or perfidious men*”<sup>176</sup> who made this confusion fashionable. Bonald marshals a number of authorities – Cousin, Bossuet, and Montesquieu – to justify the distinction between arbitrary and absolute power. Absolute power, unlike arbitrary power, bears the stamp of legitimate legality, and is itself bounded by the overarching system of laws. The contrary of absolute power is the power of particular wills, which fall under the sanction, not only of the general laws of society, but also of the Christian religion and of morality. Bonald, therefore, contends that it is absolute obedience, and not absolute power, that constitutes a true burden for the people. Absolute power is always more theoretical, more the object of the lawyer’s and philosopher’s meditations, whereas obedience, being the application of power, is a fact. He even quips that “*the absolute power of the kings of yore would never have asked of the people what the constitutional power of the monarch, armed with two chambers, have been able to obtain from them*”.<sup>177</sup> Again, this absolute character of power is universal, to be encountered in the other forms of natural society, and it is, indeed, so general, that one could conclude that there where the power cannot demand and obtain obedience, society could not exist.

The reason why absolute power, understood in the Bonaldian sense given above, is necessary pertains to the fact that the power is the active principle in the preservation of society. Action requires freedom for the agent and submission to the will he expresses and applies. Furthermore, the law of preservation requires that action be permanent and continuous; should it lapse, society would fall with it. The law of heredity, followed traditionally by most monarchies in Europe, enables this crucial continuity in the government of society. In turn, this continuity of action requires that the government sleeps not and it be perpetually vigilant about the dangers besetting society from within and from outside. Its visible presence in society enables it to direct the social action. The absence of the public power from society, its disinterest in social concerns opens the door to social disorders, and ends in usurpation. The society in which the power is the result of a usurpation is a negative society, where instead of power, minister and subjects, the negative social persons are despot, satellites and slaves.

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<sup>176</sup> *Démonstration*, p.466. A reasonable guess would perhaps identify those men with Voltaire and Condorcet (see, for example, *The Life of the former by the latter*, Robinson: London, 1790, vol.1) who were so vocal in their denunciations of arbitrary by the absolute monarchs of their time.

<sup>177</sup> *Démonstration*, p.467.

Through the properties set forth above, it becomes how the public power in a society, being the mediator, truly partakes of what may be called divine attributes. The intrinsic perfection of the public power consists in the most perfect submission to the divine will, and in the perfect political command of its own physicality and corporeity. Without these perfections, it could not undertake the function of preservation. The public power is, thus, in imitation of God, all activity. Any passivity – the pre-eminence of particular wills through the violation of laws and the subversion of the government, outrages from foreign countries, etc., – on its part ought to be immediately corrected, either by penal means within the borders of the polity, or by means of war abroad.

## **ii. Bonald's constitutional typology: From wills to persons**

The process of the formalisation of the ternary structure of society, mentioned above, from the analysis of the internal structure to the external structure, is made manifest in the way Bonald articulates his typology of political societies. After all, the treatise under consideration is meant to be an exposition of the constitutive principles of society. In this version of his typology, Bonald seems to unite the latest developments of this thought on the analogies on the different but related types of societies that coexist together compared with those societies that are antithetical to one another. In the *Théorie*, the typology was understood in terms of the exercise of the inner faculties of societies (e.g. the general will), while in the *Essai Analytique*, it was the interplay of the social persons in different societies that enabled some sort of classification. The *Législation Primitive* is not so much concerned with the typology as with the formal enunciation of the universal characters of political societies. The austere sequence of the laconic maxims of this particular work will be given due consideration in the next chapter. Yet, the articulation of the ternary structure of cause, mean, and end is very clearly set forth in the *Législation Primitive*, and is included in the doctrine of the *Démonstration* as well.

The notion of the distinctness and integrity of the social persons together with their unity is essential to Bonald's argument and typology. Thus, the social persons, taken separately, can only be unities, and not plural entities. Thus, in the monogamous family, formed out of the marriage of one man to one woman, the father is one, the mother is one and the children are one. In polygamous families, there is one father, united with a plurality of families, consisting of mothers with their respective offspring. Polygamy is a deviation of the normative understanding of marriage as the union of two individuals who are also two social persons. In

a comparable way, political societies can be either monocratic or polycratic. Polygamy, in the family, affected principally the social person of the minister, that is, the mother, whereas *polycracy* affects the social person of the power itself, in stipulating a plurality that contravenes the Bonaldian norm of monocracy.<sup>178</sup>

However, not all monarchic regimes are similar to one another. Bonald distinguishes between royal, despotic and elective types of monarchies. In monarchic regimes, all three social persons are distinct. To this quality of distinctness, Bonald also adds that of homogeneity, a similitude in the particular constitution and functioning of each social person. In a royal monarchy, such as that of France, the homogeneity was entrenched in the fact that all three social persons were vested in a number of families and perpetuated themselves according to particular rules of hereditary succession. While, there can be elevation and demotion of families from one social person to another, it is never the result of an arbitrary, unregulated or unlawful act – in other words, such social mobility should be the result of the application of the general will to a particular situation.

Additionally, the mobility was not so much of individuals as of families, and once the new position attained, it would be legally fixed. In both despotic and elective monarchies, such as those of the Ottoman Empire and of the Polish Commonwealth respectively, there was no homogeneity of social persons, especially regarding the power and the minister<sup>179</sup>. In the Ottoman Empire, while the power was fixed in one family, the membership of the ministry was subject to the pleasure of the Sultan and was not tied to the membership of a class of families within Ottoman society. There were classes of people from which the Sultans drew the greater number of their servants, officers and agents, but the positions and the membership of such classes were not legally secure. In Poland, also the power and the ministry were not homogeneous, given that the kingship was elective. This elective kingship, which was probably a necessity in those days when the Polish Commonwealth was in need of a warrior king to defend it against invaders, became a weakness, which, for Bonald, which led to the various divisions and partitions of Poland in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, until its absorption into the territories of its neighbours. In the case of the Ottoman Empire, the power is characterised by violence and arbitrariness, whereas in Poland it is weak and at the mercy of the aristocracy. In both cases,

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<sup>178</sup> *Démonstration*, p.475.

<sup>179</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.479-482.

by virtue of the state of weakness or uncertainty the power or the ministry finds itself (because of the lack of homogeneity), public society is imperilled. In such situations, it is difficult for the general will to manifest itself with any clarity, and the issue can only be either anarchy or tyranny<sup>180</sup>.

Democracy, unlike monarchy, purports to be the government of all by all. There are no social persons anymore, or rather, the distinction between social persons simply does not obtain. If there are still families and social distinctions, these are no part of the constitution and cannot claim any legal status. There are only individual citizens. Bonald's understanding of democracy was that of pure or direct democracy. The perfection of democracy lies in the direct involvement of the individual citizens even in the minutest question of daily government and administration. Most of the democracies that were established from the late 18<sup>th</sup> century onwards did not start with provisions of direct government, universal suffrage and political equality. A perfect democratic government, be it even of the smallest village, where all are constantly involved in every aspect of government is an impossibility and would, instead, constitute an hindrance to the common weal. Hence, the introduction of censitary measures to limit the number of electors and deputies, or, of the attempt at resolving deliberative dead-locks through the casting vote given to the president of an assembly. It is this decisive casting vote that would carry the assent of the majority of such an assembly one way or the other. For Bonald, a real, almost unitary, power was exercised in such cases by the fiction of the casting vote. The final decision of one seems to emerge and prevail even in the midst of democratic institutions and processes. While mediocre men start democracies, strong men always end them: *"the strong man will only be a democrat because of his ambition to take power and to wield it himself on his own"*.<sup>181</sup> Democracies seem to live in constant expectation of some strong leaders that would give it the direction it constitutively lacks by the constant recourse to consultations and deliberations. This constant expectation also contains the ferment of constant dissatisfaction, dissensions and manipulations that either end up in civil war or in foreign wars. The danger, if not the reality, of the instrumentalisation of public passions by ambitious politicians is ever present. Democracy can only maintain itself by virtue of certain exceptional circumstances: in large states, such as the United States of America, it is thanks to the dispersion of the population over a large territory, and in small state, it is due to the friendship,

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<sup>180</sup> Cf. p.482. Bonald even distinguishes legal despotism from personal despotism. The latter is properly tyranny for it is the unbounded and unlimited exercise of power.

<sup>181</sup> *Démonstration*, p.483.

if not the direct interventions, of a larger power, or still, as it is in Switzerland, thanks to the power of religion.

Unlike democracies, the social persons are not all compressed or forced into one in aristocratic regimes. Instead, the power and the ministry are made to form one social person distinct from the subjects. Aristocracies partake of the same power of conservation found in monarchies by the fact that the means for effecting such conservation is merged with the power of preservation. They are, properly speaking, “*acephalous monarchies*”,<sup>182</sup> some of which still maintained an image or symbol of the unity power, as for example, Venice with its Doge. When the ministry collectively takes power in its own, it ceases to be properly the nobility or the peerage, which are political designations that are strictly constitutive of a monarchical regime. It is, therefore, more convenient to speak of this ministry-power as being a patriciate, in whom the supreme power of the state is vested. While the character it retains of a monarchy gives it more stability, the patriciate is nonetheless liable, by virtue of the collective nature of its government, to fall into the vices of democracies. It must be guarded both against the career of ambition and the sway of popular passions. The danger of the democratic, or more strictly, collective principle within aristocracies cannot be overstated. While aristocracy, as a form of government, can be said to be a democracy of nobles, democracies tend to become aristocracies of the *bourgeois*.

This confusion was none the more apparent than in what Bonald calls “*representative government*.” He specifically refers to the Charter of 1815 and the influence of the English Constitution upon its framers and apologists. Under the constitutional provisions of the Charter, the separate existence of the three social persons was maintained. However, it also stipulated that they all had a part in the public power of society. Concurrently, there was also a separation or division of power into the three functional organs of the legislature, the executive and the judiciary. The fact that power came to be shared under the English Constitution was the result of long historical processes, including the change of religion at the Reformation, the change of dynasties (from the Tudor to the Stuarts, from Catholic Stuarts to the Protestant Stuarts, etc.), the civil wars, the fortunes of the English colonial and mercantile ventures abroad, and the enrichment of the middle classes. The English Constitution as it stood and the way the sharing of power was settled was the result of national experience that combined “*fortuitous events*

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<sup>182</sup> Ibid., p.486.

*and irregular human passions*".<sup>183</sup> Its merit as a model for an a priori reorganisation of a government, for example, that of France was debatable. For Bonald, then, the criticism of the representative government of the Charter hinges upon both the circumstances of the model of the Charter and upon the latter's concrete provisions.

The diffusion of power also entails the diffusion of responsibility, which is, in fact, enshrined in the notion of the responsibility of agents, or ministers. The legislative processes are split between the monarch, the ministers and the chambers. The fragility of ministries in the legislatures and constantly confronted with the opposition of the press was a matter of greater concern in France than in England. The latter had the better experience with representative government, with ministerial responsibility and with the expression of public opinion in the press. Furthermore, the French, unlike the English, are endowed with "*a greater liveliness of impressions and emotions that makes them engage in politics with more danger for the state and for their own good*".<sup>184</sup> The apologists of the Charter, in their desire for France to imitate England, do not see that representative government cannot be everywhere the same, and that for it to be successful in France, it will have to be adapted to the conditions of that country. England disposes of more resources that can help it counter and contain the democratic excesses of representative government: a strong land-based aristocracy that controls the legislature (Bonald was writing before the Reform Act of 1832), a mercantile empire and a prosperous merchant class, an episcopal hierarchy, all of which provided a tacit, if not explicit support for the monarchy. After the restoration, the French monarchy did not dispose of supports of comparable weight and influence in French society, but for one exception, that is, the Church. In the account given of Bonald's life in the first chapter, it was seen that he consistently endeavoured to help restore some of the prestige and property that the Church formerly enjoyed. Bonald's criticisms of representative government, especially with its tendencies to weakness, will be verified not only in the fragile and transient ministries of the restored monarchy, but also in those of the Third Republic. And once the republican government was firmly established from the late 1870s onwards, notwithstanding the unstable ministries, the association of the Church with the monarchy will remain, and constitute for the former a source of conflict with the new republican regime, that will only cease in intensity with the outbreak of the First World War.

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<sup>183</sup> *Démonstration*, p.490.

<sup>184</sup> *Démonstration*, p.493.



The confusion of persons and, more crucially, the sharing of power with subjects were things quite unconceivable for Bonald. That subjects, historically, could be and were selected to be agents of power cannot be denied. However, to vest a portion of power in subjects amounts to creating a contradiction, or to making a political concession to contingent events, which in the long run cannot but contribute to the decline of society, instead of its preservation.

### iii. On Religious Society

Bonald wrote extensively in his *Théorie* on the subject of the religious society as part of that overarching society of humans that he called “civil society”. As with most of the concepts he expounded in his previous works, in the *Démonstration*, he reiterates the fundamental points made in his first published work and develops them further.

The religious society is the mutual society of God and men, for the mutual spiritual preservation of both, whereby God preserves men by virtue of his love for them, and men transmit and preserve the knowledge of God for the benefit of present and future human societies. There society is at all possible between God and men proceed from the fact that they both have spiritual natures – God being pure spirit, and, men being compounds of spiritual and corporal natures. The difference between God and even his most spiritual or intellectual creatures is infinite. Yet, the latter, by their creation, was given to participate, in their own creaturely and limited way, in the spirituality of the divine nature.

The emergence of religion is not to be attributed to a revelation to a lonely, single individual, with no links or obligations to others. Instead, Bonald believes that religion, in its earliest phases, emerged concurrently with the domestic society, that is, the family. In such remote antiquities, in this domestic religion, the father himself would be the minister or priest of the deity, and the members of the family would be its votaries. Natural religion was inseparable from natural society, and religion, itself, in its outward manifestation was, both naturally and historically, strictly a social phenomenon<sup>185</sup>. The degeneration of domestic and natural religion occurred when confused and erroneous notions of the deity came to prevail. This occurred, according to Bonald, when the fundamental and primitive dogma of divine unity was

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<sup>185</sup> *Démonstration*, p.503.

abandoned in favour of polytheism. Thus, he ascribes to polytheism in religion, the same effects he ascribed to polygamy and polycracy upon the domestic and political societies respectively.

The knowledge of God's unity, that is, the unity of the universal power, was nonetheless preserved in the families of the patriarchs of the Old Testament, and when the families together became a people, it saw itself as the unique custodian of this dogma. The whole of the history of Israel is the history of its faithfulness or unfaithfulness to the revelation of divine unity given and transmitted to its patriarchs, legislators, prophets, judges and kings. The patriarchal religion corresponds to the domestic state of the religious society whereas the Judaic religion, as Bonald calls the religious society of the Jews after the return from Egypt, was public and national. The ternary social structure was present in all these phases of what may truly be termed "*Jewish Antiquities*", and in the times of the monarchy, it was even doubled, that is, the religious and the political societies each had their ternary structure. This public state of the Jewish religion did not last long, as they were repeatedly reduced, conquered and finally dispersed. The public ministry of the priesthood lapsed and the kingship was never fully restored. With the dispersion of the Jewish people, the Judaic religion reverted to the domestic state of the patriarchal era.

While it was the vocation of the Jewish religion to proclaim the dogma of the unity of the universal power over the universe and societies, the task of the Christian religion was to broadcast the historical manifestation of the ministry, of the mediator between God and the universe. A universal power required a universal minister. And it is in Christianity, called to be the universal religion, or society, that the mediator of the universal power would himself teach all men<sup>186</sup>. The homogeneity of the social persons would require that the mediator be at once similar to both the power and the subjects, to be at once human and divine (cf. Section C above).

To preserve, teach and transmit the dogmas of divine unity and of universal mediation, the universal mediator himself founded a new society, of which he himself was the power. But the purpose of this new society was not only to preserve, teach and transmit the revealed truths. In a short excursory chapter that preceded the one on religious society, Bonald gave an explanation of sacrifice in terms of the relations between the social persons. He defines

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<sup>186</sup> *Démonstration*, p.512. Here Bonald also plays on one of the meanings of the word "*catholic*" to signify his belief that this universal society could only be the Catholic Church.

sacrifice as *“the gift of oneself that the minister makes to the power in the name and for the sake of the subjects, by offering both men and property, which together make society”*.<sup>187</sup> The sacrifice of oneself, of one’s service for the sake of social preservation, of *“life and limb”*, was present in all societies, and has ever been the privilege of the ministry, the nobles, to offer willingly. The purpose of the sacrifice was to thank God for the blessings received, to ask for more such blessings and to propitiate for sins committed against his justice. In doing so, it was thought fit to offer only what is best and dearest to man: himself or his property. It was only in idolatrous religions that man thus offered was also immolated and thus truly sacrificed, whereas, in the Judaic religion, as for example, in the history of Isaac, commands the sacrifice, accepts the offering, but does not require the immolation of the human victim.

Hence, it was only fitting that the universal mediator should offer himself in a sacrifice to the universal power for the sake of the universal society, and, indeed, of the whole universe. Indeed, this supreme sacrifice of himself, willingly offered, and freely accepted by the universal power, constituted the supreme act of salvation and reconciliation between the universal power and the subjects. As power over this new, universal society, the mediator needed to be made present to it at all times. His presence is already ensured by the precepts and the visible hierarchy he left, but, even more especially, in the sacrament of the Eucharist whereby the sacrifice he made is ever rendered present.

The entire Christian religion, then, depends upon the mediation of Jesus Christ, the universal mediator between God and men. This mediation, with all that it implies of the communion between God and men, together with the blessings derived from it, is made tangible and communicable only in the universal Christian society, or the Church.

For Bonald, the importance of the union of the religious society with the political society cannot be overstated. It is only in such a union that he saw the possibility of the preservation of states and of civilisations: *“It is the identity of principle and of constitution between the religious monarchy and the political monarchy that has made the perfection and the true strength, the strength of preservation or of restoration of Catholic states”*.<sup>188</sup>

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<sup>187</sup> *Démonstration*, p.505.

<sup>188</sup> *Démonstration*, p.518.

#### **iv. On the Reformation and its sequels**

Bonald viewed the reformation as bringing about both religious and political divisions. The divisions were clearly expressed in the divergent doctrines of the Catholic Church and of the Reformed Churches on the subject of the religious society. Bonald held that in the Catholic religion, the three social persons were clearly distinct from one another. Ordination and consecration into the order of the clergy imparted its members a character that set them apart from the laity. The order of the clergy also perpetuated itself, through the apostolic succession of its hierarchs, in a hereditary or spiritual filiation. Authority was vested in them, as they were the mediators between the universal Mediator and the laity.

In the Reformed religion, in Calvinism in particular, the distinction between the minister and the layman is a purely functional one. Any layman can be, and indeed, is a minister, whenever the appointed ministers happened to be absent. Bonald even argues that everyone can be his own power by virtue of one's private judgement and individual authority to interpret the scriptures for oneself. All persons are conflated into one, the believer, who communes directly with God, without the benefit of the ministry of any ecclesial hierarchy. Calvinism, then, corresponds, as a religious society, to democracy in politics. Attempts at order were made in the promulgation of creedal confessions and in the organisation of regional churches and congregations into consistories and synods, but the confusion of persons and the utter license in belief and practice did not disappear.

One of the consequences of this absence of inner authority was the increasing reliance of such churches on the civil magistrate<sup>189</sup>. In turn, this resulted in the confusion of the religious with the political society. The churches became extensions of the civil administration and lost a considerable independence. The lack of authority also produces a lack of unity. Hence, one should not be surprised at the variety and number of different Reformed denominations. Bonald also attacks Calvinism for having reintroduced divorce, and by this act, to have introduced laxity in moral matters and dealt a serious blow to the traditional notion of the domestic society. He also attacks it for weakening the belief in the immortality of souls by proscribing the invocations of saints and prayers for the dead. By doing so, it also weakens the connections between the living and the dead, that sometimes can be bring consolation to the bereaved. In

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<sup>189</sup> *Démonstration*, p.520.

saying that Calvinism is more of a domestic than public religion, Bonald no doubt meant that it was above all a private religion, with no priests and no altars. There can be no fruitful union between a private religion that hardly acknowledges any external authority and a public society that is dedicated to social preservation.

If Calvinism corresponds to democracy, Lutheranism corresponds to aristocracy. While it preserves a clergy, that is, a distinct ministry, it does not acknowledge the visible representative of the power on earth (the Roman Pontiff). In this, it is similar to the Greek Church. Bonald here tries to force the analogy between dissident sect and imperfect form of government by remarking that while Calvin depended upon the bourgeoisie of Geneva to implement his reformation, Luther, on the other hand, relied on the support of some German princes. When it comes to Catholicism, Bonald, opines that it can accommodate itself of all forms of government, but that not all forms of government can and will accommodate Catholicism. Being the most perfect religion, it is truly fruitful only when united by the most perfect form of government, that is, monarchy.

The apologetic and polemic intent of Bonald is here unmistakable. The continuity between the democratic revolutions of the late 18<sup>th</sup> century and the religious revolutions of the early 16<sup>th</sup> century becomes more definite in light of the sociological analysis and assessment of the effects of those major changes. As Bonald himself puts it: *"I have not professed to explain the nature and the sense of mysteries; rather, I have tried to show their necessity and their reason"*.<sup>190</sup> There is a nature and a structure of things that always eludes the dictates of human will. This is highly suggestive of a distinction that emerges now and then in the treatises considered so far: that of substance and accident. Revolutions and reformations do not, and cannot, affect the substance of societies, but only their accidents.

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<sup>190</sup> *Démonstration*, p.532.

## Chapter 4

### Bonald's Critique and Renovation of Philosophy

Bonald's views on the history and problems of philosophy can be found dispersed throughout his entire works, intricately bound up with his analysis of the constitution of societies and the nature of revolutions. However, he also felt the need to express and develop those views at great length and depth in several places, namely, the "*Discours préliminaire*" of the "*Législation primitive*", in the "*Recherches philosophique sur les premiers objets des connaissances morales*",<sup>191</sup> and the "*Dissertation sur la pensée de l'homme et sur son expression*" that follows either the "*Essai Analytique*" or the "*Recherches*" depending on the

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<sup>191</sup> The text referenced here is that of the *Œuvres de M. de Bonald*, Librairie Adrien Le Clere, Paris 1875 with occasional reference to the complete works published by Migne, 1859, vol.III.

edition. The aim of the essay on philosophy in the “*Discours préliminaires*” is to give an account of “widespread philosophical doctrines that have hitherto divided men, amidst the diversity of opinions”,<sup>192</sup> and to show their connection with political and social ideas. In the “*Recherches*”, Bonald aims at articulating his definitive theory of philosophy through disquisitions on the theory of language, the so-called theory of the “*primitive revelation*”, and a theory of causality that encompasses both God and man. It is in these philosophical works that Bonald will attempt at showing the inherent unity of theology and politics through the deployment of a social philosophy that aims at encompassing and accounting for the totality of human experience.

### A. The Allegory of Philosophy and Revolution

The first problem identified and commented upon at length by Bonald is one of definition. The confusions and errors to be found in philosophical doctrines must be ascribed to erroneous notions regarding the true nature of philosophy and to the ways in which the word “*philosophy*” itself has been used or misused. The problem of definition is inherently connected to a crisis in the self-understanding of philosophy. For the ancient Greeks, philosophy, following its etymology, was the love of wisdom<sup>193</sup>. Following them, the word has come to designate a type of enquiry, relying upon the lights of natural reason, into the principles of human knowledge, the rules of intellectual judgements and the grounds of obligations and duties<sup>194</sup>. It has also come to mean a type of enquiry based upon an absolute and fundamental questioning of the grounds of all beliefs, practices and social arrangements. It is from this diversity of meanings, reflecting the multiple composite systems in which philosophy is but an element among others, an element wedded to others, that the attempt of extracting an authentic understanding of philosophy must be made.

This is precisely what Bonald endeavours to do in a piece from 1810 entitled “*La Philosophie et la Révolution*”, which is an allegory (he calls it an “*anecdote*”) of his understanding of the history or progress of philosophy from ancient Greece down to the present time<sup>195</sup>. In this allegory, Philosophy is depicted as a young lady, who after having held considerable sway in ancient Greece, fell away from such eminence into the poverty and confusion of the scholastic systems of the successors of the first philosophers and of the Middle Ages. It is then that she

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<sup>192</sup> “*Discours préliminaire*” in *Législation Primitive*, in *Œuvres du Vicomte de Bonald* published by the Société Nationale Pour la Propagation des Bons Livres, Brussels, 1845, vol.1, p.153.

<sup>193</sup> *Discours préliminaire*, p.158.

<sup>194</sup> Cf. *Recherches philosophiques*, p.5.

<sup>195</sup> Bonald. *Œuvres Complètes*. Vol.III. Migne: Paris 1859, columns 535-540.

meets Reason who sought to revive her with the ideas of Descartes and by imparting to her a prudent doubt about the foundations of her knowledge. With the more religiously inclined disciples of Descartes, namely, Malebranche, Fénelon, and Leibniz, she is initiated into the heights of religious truth and morality; they taught her *“to think with greater depth and to express herself with more elegance”*. However, this gain in elegance was also accompanied by her acquaintance with Literature, who seduced her away from Religion, or rather, made her rather too curious about it, and being unable to satisfy her curiosity, she left it altogether. Literature, in turn, led her to the school of Voltaire. There, philosophy found Wit, and from this moment, all her habits and practices changed. Bonald depicts the moral degeneration of philosophy in terms of the coming out of a debutante that went wrong: leaving the retreat in which she used to thrive, she introduced by Wit into the fashionable society of Credit, Opulence, Pleasure, and Impiety. It was in the house of Impiety that Philosophy met Atheism; the latter attached itself to Philosophy and the two were inseparable. This last liaison was a great scandal, and after a while, Philosophy gave birth to Revolution. The birth took place in secret, Politics became the infant’s nurse, while Wit became its tutor. The strength of the infant Revolution was considerable – *“already it was reading with ease the Encyclopédie, it could make sense of Diderot, and was understood with facility in all European languages, especially German”*. Finally, the infant was revealed to the world by its mother, who vaunted its progresses, and its constitution, which gave cause for much hope in the world. A few voices were raised that criticised Revolution, but these were opposed by Enthusiasm and Foolishness. Meanwhile, the constitution of the infant was changing: it became hideous and fierce, and started to abuse everyone, including its mother’s friends. While it professed great respect for its mother Philosophy, in reality, the infant Revolution loved its father Atheism most. Attempts were made to rein in its excesses but all these were to no avail. Philosophy wanted to disown her progeny and give it over to Politics, who would have none of it and who now regretted ever having anything to do with it. Some recommended it be killed, while more moderate opinion proposed to ban it. The last solution was agreeable to the mother and the infant was sent abroad, where it was received by the relatives and friends of its mother. Philosophy is reported to grieve bitterly over the fate of her child. She openly expresses the hope that one day it will return, more reasoned and moderate. When it seems difficult, if not impossible for her to justify its excesses, she goes as far as to disown Revolution, and that there was an exchange of babies at birth. Her friends, to placate her, pretend to agree with her.



In this allegory, Bonald situates clearly, howbeit imaginatively, his conception of the predicament of philosophy. It is not a coincidence that he depicts philosophy as a woman, a companion and a mother. If one were attempt a vague analogy and ascribe a social personality to philosophy based upon the ternary structure of society, one would ascribe to it a position similar to that of the ministry. In fact, it appears that philosophy, under the pen of Bonald, has a tendency to become the instrument of the spirit of the age. In itself, it has no content, it receives its content and determination from whatever ideology happens to be dominant within society. It is that which enables the articulate expression and communication of such an ideology. Before going into a more detailed consideration of the particulars of the allegory, it would be pertinent to give an account of Bonald's own sketch of the history of philosophy.

The theme of philosophy as the minister or *handmaid* of something or of somebody else is what helps to situate the inescapable social context of philosophising. Were one to cast one's mind back to the highest antiquity about which records are available (which, for Bonald was the Hebrew antiquity) one finds an absence of a need for philosophy, in this technical or instrumental sense. Rather, the love of wisdom and religion were quite inseparable and, even, undistinguishable. The Hebrew "*philosophy*" contained the knowledge of a first and supreme transcendent cause, whose general will was also known and communicated, and formed the basis of the social organisation of that people.<sup>196</sup> This knowledge was maintained and transmitted among the Hebrews and the Jews, first exclusively orally, and then subsequently, in writing. In other peoples, the original revelation of a single divine transcendent cause was forgotten, and a confusion between cause and effect arose which led to the identification of the deity with natural phenomena. Religion, comprising of the outward rituals and ordinances of a people, and the quest for the physical and moral truth of the universe diverged until they finally separated.

It was in ancient Greece that this separation was the most perceptible. There came to be two philosophies, as it were, one was a divine philosophy, which was coterminous with religion and theology, and the other a human philosophy, which was exclusively preoccupied with the grounds of human knowledge and with moral questions. Religions other than the Hebrew or Judaic had so far fallen away from the original knowledge of the divine cause, and been debased in anthropomorphic or zoomorphic ideas of the divine, that the philosophers came to doubt the traditional cosmogonies could ever yield a knowledge of the truth of the universe.

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<sup>196</sup> *Discours préliminaire*, pp.158-159.

Yet, by virtue of the social context of the Roman Empire, which enabled the interaction between different cultures, religions and schools of philosophy, Judaism and Christianity came into contact with Greek philosophy. Christianity attempted a reconciliation of the two philosophies, divine and human. The patristic synthesis of faith and reason reposed upon a certain Platonism, while the endeavours of the Scholastics were the result of their appropriation of the Aristotelian system. Bonald took a rather dismissive view of the exertions of the Scholastics whereby “*the mechanic rules of the art of reasoning displaced reason, while some would fain find in universals and categories the universality of human knowledge*”.<sup>197</sup> However, in spite of the disputes between schools and movements, there was an outward and visible principle of unity, which gave the works of the Scholastics a certain orientation, inasmuch as they submitted themselves to the ecclesial authority when the latter came to pronounce itself upon matters of faith and morals. The loss of this unity was also accompanied by the recovery of ancient Greek learning and by remarkable advances in the sciences, which combined together to discredit Scholastic philosophy and limit its sway.

A new philosophy was needed that would enable human reason to start all over again. Bacon attempted to renew philosophy and reorganise its methods upon an empirical basis. This empiricism was further developed and systematised by Locke in his “*An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*” (1689). Condillac, in turn, will help propagating the ideas of Locke, while creating his own sensualist philosophy. Bonald then moves to the work of Descartes and his subjectivist rationalism, which was to influence much of modern philosophy. For Descartes, the renewal of philosophy is dependent upon the analysis and renewal of one’s thinking process, which required a method and the deployment of universal doubt. From Plato, he borrowed the notion of innate ideas, which was criticised by Locke, who, following Bacon, believed in the empirical origin of ideas. Malebranche and Spinoza were the continuators of the Cartesian school, the first in the direction of theism, and the other, in that of atheism or pantheism. The empiricism of Locke was countered by the rationalism of Leibniz, who came to dominate philosophy in Germany until the advent of Kant. Kant sought to recapitulate both empiricism and rationalism, and also overcome their respective difficulties. This he did by appealing to the critical and structuring power of pure reason. For Bonald, there is a significant parallel between Luther’s reformation in religion and Kant’s revolution in philosophy, in that

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<sup>197</sup> *Recherches philosophiques*, p.16.

both intended, relying upon their own strengths, to overturn the wisdom of the past and radically refound whole religions or academic disciplines.

In the allegory of Philosophy and Revolution, the turning point is the reintroduction of a particular scepticism, which was the result of the application of doubt not only to physical truths of the natural world, but also to moral and religious truths. The legacy of Cartesian thought is thus ambiguous. On the one hand, there is an attempt to bring philosophy back to its foundations, and on the other, there was a disregard for what was already established and confirmed by the historical practice of society. This new scepticism, or the application of methodic doubt, to social truths leads to the notion that society can be legitimately changed and be made to agree with the solutions propounded by such scepticism. The distinction between physical nature and moral nature is here fundamental. The changes in man's understanding of nature can only affect the way he utilises nature. These changes can only have a bearing upon him and society as far as their material organisation is concerned – that is, they can help improve his material existence through technological progress and the advances of medical science. When it comes to the moral realm, however, and the question of social power and duties arises, the presumption must be that the structure of society is justified by some truth, which may or may not be hidden or forgotten. And the social task of philosophy is not so much to overturn the structure, as to seek to understand it, and thereby, rediscover and reveal the truth of the social order. As much as truth and order are inseparable, so are error and disorder<sup>198</sup>. The mistake of certain trends of the Enlightenment has been to put moral and social truths on a par with physical truths. The naturalism and immanentism prevalent in the physical sciences could not fail to redound upon the moral and religious sciences as well. The alliance of philosophy with atheism rendered this even more likely. The divine origin and legislation of the world and of society was now excluded, or, at least, severely limited. The function of philosophy or of the new social science was not thenceforward merely descriptive, but came to be seen and accepted as prescriptive as well. The cultivation of moral truths and virtues were deprivatised and politicised. The improvement of man's lot was not conceived in terms of personal perfection that was enabled and fostered by society. On the contrary, it was the improvement of society that was sought through a structural reform of social institutions. Political activism achieved to transform this impulse for reform into a full-fledged revolutionary movement. Thus, in Bonald's mind, it is beyond any doubt that what passed for philosophy for much of the 17th and 18th centuries bears a rather heavy burden of

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<sup>198</sup> *Discours préliminaire*, pp.166-167.

responsibility in the preparation and outbreak of the revolution, not so much in structural and physical terms, as in ideological and moral terms. For Bonald, a genuine understanding of philosophy entails a critique of the Enlightenment idea and practice of philosophy that he satirised in the allegory of Philosophy and Revolution. True philosophy, unlike the philosophy of the (radical) Enlightenment, is not about the creation of truth, social, moral, etc., but it is truly a quest for truth<sup>199</sup>, that is bounded by social traditions, and ultimately, by revelation.

## **B. Bonald's Restoration of Philosophy**

### **i. The Theory of Ideas**

In order to renew philosophy as a discipline, one would need further to identify the problem or the set of problems, upon the resolution of which previous endeavours in philosophy have invariably failed. In other words, one would have to seek the substantive question that is common to all schools of philosophy, and to propose a new answer. For Bonald, this fundamental question was that of the origin of ideas and of the principles governing human knowledge<sup>200</sup>. While commending the ancient Greek philosophers, especially Plato, he rarely has anything good to say about their followers and their mediaeval scholastic commentators. His exposure to the Scholastics and to the variety of their doctrines appears to have been quite limited. The study of the mediaeval scholastics was notoriously neglected in the educational system of his age. His time at the Oratorian school would have earned him at most a familiarity with the common *topoi* of the ancient philosophers, while the rest of his philosophical education would be occupied with the study of Cartesianism, especially through the interpretation of Malebranche. Behind his attacks, then, against what he perceived to be the debased philosophy of the mediaeval schools, the real object of his critique was the absence or, rather, a lack of overarching authority in or over the discipline of philosophy that might have given it direction. The pursuit and cultivation of wisdom must be free from the weight of contradicting schools and opinions. The interventions of the Church were limited to those cases where philosophy and theology overlapped, or where the development of philosophical premises and arguments might lead to conclusions that went against the sense of Church teaching. The formal exercise of philosophy, if it were to be of any relevance to society or to religion (that is, ordained towards the preservation of society), needed to be at once oriented and circumscribed. The morale of the allegory of Philosophy and Revolution was precisely that

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<sup>199</sup> *Discours préliminaire*, p.158.

<sup>200</sup> *Recherches philosophiques*, p.25.

philosophy left to its own devices may well attach itself to doctrines that could imperil the stability of the social and moral order. But the question of authority, together with that of the principle of philosophical enquiry, is not only external, but also internal to philosophy. That is to say, in the absence of this formal and external authority to direct the course of philosophical enquiry, there must be an authority internal to philosophy that could fulfil a comparable function. Now, the notion of an internal authority may be misleading insofar as it seems to endow philosophy with a sort of agency separate from that of its practitioners. Rather, it is precisely because of this obvious lack of agency (about which little can be done unless one hypostatises philosophy itself) or of a commonly recognised authority that he perceived the academic and public profession of philosophy to be in disarray: *“Men, being naturally independent of one another, govern themselves in their actions by their wills, in their thoughts by their reason, and human reason only accepts the authority of demonstration, or the demonstration of authority”*.<sup>201</sup>

This problem, in turn, is compounded by the fact that in Bonald’s account, it has been framed in terms of either a dualism or a dialectic of idea and sensation. When man looks for the principle of knowledge either in his ideas or in his sensations, he is looking for it in himself. In such a case, his conception of the principle of knowledge will depend upon his reception and understanding of his sensations, or upon his perception of his own thinking. Yet, in order to avoid falling into subjectivism, the activity of the mind receiving and processing concepts, notions and sensations must not be confused with knowledge itself. For such an activity can only be appraised by the mind itself. In this case, the mind is not only the organ of knowledge, but is also reflecting upon its own activity. The danger may then arise to mistake this self-reflective activity of the mind for the cognitive apprehension of the intellectual world of innate ideas or of the external world of social facts. An objection may be raised here about the equivocal use of the word *“idea”*. What the more radical philosophers of the Enlightenment actually understood by *“ideas”* were fundamentally different from *“innate ideas”* or *“general ideas”* as Bonald calls them. The former are really conceptual abstractions that were derived from sense-perception, through the aid of which man describes his experience of the world. On the other hand, Bonald’s notion of innate or general ideas differs from conventional accounts of innatism by his insistence on the a priori correspondence and concurrence between general

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<sup>201</sup> *Recherches philosophiques*, p.33. The word *évidence* is here rendered *demonstration*.

ideas in men and the external social fact independently of men's conscious and voluntary experience.

What all philosophers look for or, ought to look for, is an authoritative beginning, a starting point that would govern the practice and inspire the achievements of philosophical enquiries. When one makes of the question of the origin of ideas and of the principle of human knowledge the fundamental question of philosophy, any answer that may be attempted to this question will no doubt constitute this authoritative inception. But this authoritative inception cannot be perceived by the mind self-reflectivity upon its inner life, nor yet in the mere apprehension and description of the objects of our experience. Instead, one must look for an external fact, which is primitive and originary, historical and social: "*This fact is, or seems to me to be, the primitive gift of language that was made to humankind; which gift is the fundamental question underlying all moral questions*".<sup>202</sup> The primacy of human language or speech is fundamental for Bonald in his attempt at reforming the whole of philosophy. In order to understand this primacy and its social character, one must first seek to understand the correct relations that exist between thoughts, images, ideas and words, between the contents of the mind and of language, and their expression.

Bonald's theory of language, then, seeks to be a theory of the knowledge of truth, not one of doubt, based upon methodical belief but not methodical doubt. The standard of this truth is not to be sought in the naked individuality of man engaged in an inward activity of self-analysis, but in seeking the evidence of the perpetual witness of societies throughout history and throughout the world, and in articulating one's assent to it. Again, while the physical sciences may well start with doubt, it ought not to be so with the moral sciences, in which one needs to give existing beliefs the benefit of the doubt, unless and until they be disproved. To the light of the individual man's own reason that seeks to query everything, Bonald opposes the light of a universal and social reason, "*the reason of all peoples and of all societies, the reason of all times and places*".<sup>203</sup> He goes even further to argue that, in the moral sciences there is a more immediate adequation of knowledge with received beliefs and faith (here a sort of social assent, not to be confused with the theological virtue) than there is in natural sciences. The knowledge and cultivation of universal truths is essential to the preservation of society – a merely private adherence to them, while doubtless beneficial for the moral advancement of the individual man

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<sup>202</sup> *Recherches philosophiques*, p.45.

<sup>203</sup> *Ibid.*, p.57.

or woman, does not suffice, for the moral health of societies directly relies upon the social application of these universal moral truths.

For several of the atheists and the deists of the Enlightenment, those universal truths, or rather, the ideas underlying what purported to be universal truths, were not objective realities that were independent of men's perception and judgment. Rather, they were the result of his sensations and of his experience. In this view, the external social fact, too, was understood to be result of human perceptions and desires. It was not endowed with any objectivity that was independent of human will. The notion of God, his attributes, and the entire system of theology, in this perspective, are but artifices devised by rulers, throughout the world, to demand and enforce the obedience of their subjects<sup>204</sup>. For Bonald, such a line of reasoning was fraught with what he perceived to be an insurmountable contradiction. It seemed to him that the recourse to such a device was premised on the a priori and universal existence of certain ideas in men regarding the divine, its attributes, and moral obligations in general. Instead of doubting the truth of these truly general and universal ideas, philosophers should rather attach themselves to the discovery of their origins as ideas and not as alleged devices of social control.

The question of the origin of ideas was not merely another topos in the works of natural philosophers. It was, and perhaps remains, of the utmost political significance. If ideas were the creations (physiological or voluntary) of human minds in their experiences of the world through sense-perception, they were contingent aspects of human experience, and not intellectual objects as such. Hence, they were liable to change. For Condillac, there could be no doubt that ideas, whether simple or complex, were the result of perceptions, and were not intellectual objects that could exist independently of a human mind or will<sup>205</sup>. Thinking and other types of intellectual activities were also dependent upon sense-perception, and could only be said to create ideas as a result of experience. The contingency of ideas, their purely natural and, even, physiological origin together with a view of nature as constantly changing and evolving all seemed to contradict a traditional account of a stable human nature, and therefore, of stable substances in general. For Condorcet, for example, the external general "*fact*" was understood primarily in terms of the observable developments in human faculties, from the simple apprehension of the senses to the contrivance of society in terms of human interests<sup>206</sup>.

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<sup>204</sup> "*Dissertation sur la pensée de l'homme*" col.429 in *Œuvres Complètes* III.

<sup>205</sup> Cf. Etienne Bonnot de Condillac. *Essay on the origins of human knowledge* (1746). Part 1, section III, p.104. Translation of Thomas Nugent and published J. Nourse in London in 1756.

<sup>206</sup> Nicolas de Condorcet. *Esquisse d'un tableau historique des progrès de l'esprit humain*. Paris: Agasse 1795, pp.1-3. The whole Introduction can be read as the programmatic statement of the political philosophy of progress.

Moral perfection proceeds from physiological perfection, to which, together with the advances of science and technology, Condorcet believed, the whole of mankind was destined. The idea of change, or progress had to be a universal rule as it was based upon universally observable facts. For Bonald, this sheer naturalism was not acceptable principally because it was premised upon an erroneous understanding of ideas that informed and inspired the equally misguided revolutionary activism of the 1790s in France.

In his account, general ideas, being true, are by definition free from error. Whence, then, the erroneous accounts of physical and moral reality to be found in philosophies and religious systems? Error is the result not merely of mistaking the images of sense-perception for the general ideas, but it also consists in the misapprehension and misunderstanding of the necessary relations that exist between general ideas and social reality, between God and his creation, and between created beings among themselves. Bonald invites us to consider what he deems to be an erroneous proposition, namely: “*the people is the supreme power*”.<sup>207</sup> In this proposition, man did not invent or create either “*the people*” or the “*supreme power*”. Rather, these are words referring to objects that exist independently of man as general ideas. The error of the proposition lies in a relation of identity established between general ideas that are not, in fact, identical. Similarly, atheists, when considering the natural world, would not identify the necessary cause of the world with a divine being. While the atheist rules out the very possibility of entertaining the idea of divinity, even as a hypothesis, he nevertheless admits to the necessity of a cause. Here, he disagrees with the theist regarding the identity and nature of the cause, and displaces the necessary relation between God and creation, to some other causal principle within creation and the rest of creation. Thus, in the notions of popular sovereignty and of the eternity of the world, or of matter, the right, natural and necessary relations existing in reality are subverted. In this subversion, or inversion, sense-perception and the mental images derived from it come to determine the order of these relations, to the exclusion of general ideas as such. The apprehension and knowledge of reality is confined to a pure domain of experience, supported by empirical evidence, purporting to be free from prior determinations, such as preconceived notions and prejudices that are held to obstruct and hinder the course of such experience.

Bonald’s own doctrine seeks to comprehend and transcend both the rationalist and sensationalist theories of ideas. While he opposed the generation of ideas out of sense-

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<sup>207</sup> “*Dissertation sur la pensée de l’homme*” columns 434-435 in *Œuvres Complètes* III.



perception, he nevertheless recognised the benefits of the empirical method used by the sensationalists<sup>208</sup>. Thus, in his inquiry into the origin of ideas, the discursive apprehension of ideas and the observation of their external expression are joined together - a combination of the “*esprit géométrique*” and of the empirical method. If ideas are, indeed, innate, or natural to man, their external expression requires nonetheless the aid of the senses. In other words, in order for ideas to be fully present to men both intellectually and operatively, they need to be named, and the names need to be transmitted to the successive generations of human beings. Ideas, then, must be considered both as intellectual objects that are “*in*” man, and the expression of ideas, that can be communicated to man. Man can only be made aware of the “*innate*” ideas by means of words, and it is through words that the ideas can be expressed. If man possesses the “*potentiality*” of ideas in himself, it is only through language, words and speech that they can have any actuality for him. Otherwise man could not name his thoughts, express them and communicate them in any meaningful sense to others. The correspondence between ideas and words that express them is of the very essence of any meaningful communication between human beings. The constancy of the correspondence is assured through the use of a language is that contains all the words, names, signs that enables the identification and use, as it were, of ideas. The nameless awareness of ideas does not constitute their actuality, or even, their proper intentionality. Therefore, the operations of the mind itself, on its own, cannot be relied upon. Thus, for Bonald, the question of the origin of ideas is not so much one of their putative creation *ab nihilo* and their implantation in man by the deity, as of the social conditions that attend their expression and communication.

## ii. The Theory of Language: Primitive Revelation and Tradition

Speech, then, or language, is that through which ideas are made present to man. In Bonald’s vivid words, the understanding “*is that obscure place where we do not perceive any idea, not even those of our own intellect, until speech, entering through the senses of hearing or of sight, bringing light into the darkness, summons, as it were, every single idea who answers back (...): Here I am*”.<sup>209</sup> Without this active mediation of speech, of words, spoken or written, man cannot be said to be in conscious and operative possession of ideas. One could go so far and note the truly demiurgic function that Bonald attributes to language. Language truly brings ideas into a social existence, ere which they subsisted in potentiality.

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<sup>208</sup> Robert Spaemann. *Un philosophe face à la Révolution: La pensée politique de Louis de Bonald*. Paris: Hora Decima, 2008, pp.57-58.

<sup>209</sup> *Dissertation sur la pensée de l’homme*. Col. 425.

Even an empiricist<sup>210</sup> may well concede the role of language in the expression of ideas, inasmuch as, in his system, ideas remain the result of sensations. The truth of ideas, received from the sensations that produced them, would be expressed in language. However, the empiricist will soon be confronted to a host of words that, in his estimation, could not be connected with the experience of anything that exists in the world, or that has not yet been proven to exist. These words do not refer to anything that falls within the reach of human sense-experience, and that can be abstracted from human experience. This probably means that man invented those words and ascribed to them fanciful meanings. And that if man could invent those words, there is nothing to prove that man did not himself invent language as such. For the empiricist, there is no necessary correspondence between audible and visible linguistic signs and their referents, and language is purely a matter of human convention that arises out of human needs.

Bonald's philosophical opposition to the theory of the human invention of language articulates itself in a series of descriptions of mental states and external acts, culminating in a conclusion. Building upon his theory of ideas expounded in the previous section, he seeks to comprehend the phenomenon of thinking in relations to its linguistic expression. Thus, the fundamental axiom that governs his philosophical demonstration is that "*Man thinks his speech, before speaking his thought*".<sup>211</sup> The activity of thinking comprehends both the intellectual production and consideration of images and of ideas. It is "*the attention that the mind gives to images and to ideas in order to combine them together*". Thus, speech, as the expression of thinking, can only be the expression of images and ideas. There are sounds that express either images or ideas, or even both, and that suggest them to man's mind. When one hears and reads words or groups of words that describes certain objects of the physical world, the mind produces the mental images of those objects. The images thus produced in the mind, can be reproduced either by gestures or by drawings, and can be communicated without the benefit of language. The simple and mutual recognition of a physical object by two humans can occur through the simple medium of physical images.

It is, however, not so with ideas. When one hears the word or groups of words describing an idea, one does not naturally or necessarily form mental images of the ideas, nor could one reproduce them through drawing or any other form of pictorial reproduction as single images

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<sup>210</sup> Cf. Condorcet, op.cit. Here in particular, because of their application to the history of mankind, Condorcet's views may be taken as representative of the common empiricist position opposed by Bonald.

<sup>211</sup> *Recherches philosophiques*. Chapter 2: *De l'origine du langage*, p.64.

that are instantly recognisable. Of course, one could attempt to represent an idea through pictures and symbols, but there would be no necessary correspondence between the idea and its representation, which would be a matter of sheer creative licence. When one hears the word “*cause*”, or thinks it, one does not mentally entertain the putative image of a cause. The presence of ideas to one’s mind is imageless, and can only contingently be associated with images. And yet the presence of those ideas is nonetheless real and communicable among men. Ideas, together with the abstract objects of the mind do in reality exist, but they do not exist in the same way that the physical objects that men perceive through their senses exist. For Bonald, the application of methodical belief, instead of doubt, requires the acceptance that all those objects, physical, ideal or abstract, are, in fact, beings, either potentially or in act: “*All that language names either is or can be; only nothing and impossibility do not have names*”.<sup>212</sup> The question of the origin of language, then, is one both of the internal intention and of the external recognition of ideas in the course of human interaction. Whereas the communication of images between human beings could be deemed natural, that is, pertaining to and continuous with the processes inherent to human nature, the language of man was clearly either the contrivance of man himself, or that of something else outside of man. If language were a mere aspect of human, and even, animal nature in the world, communication by means of images and mere sounds would probably have been sufficient for human beings to relate to one another. It is not that human language is not natural or necessary – rather, while rooted in human physicality by means of the senses, it constantly puts man above his immediate physical needs in enabling him to name his ideas, and to contemplate a reality beyond his own, beyond a merely instinctive knowledge of time and space.

Could language, as the expression of ideas, be the fortuitous contrivance of human minds at a stage along the path of a process of some physiological evolution? For Bonald, this would amount to acknowledging the purely conventional nature of language, and at the same time, the conventional and artificial character of all human society. In other words, the theory of the human invention of language is, according to him, highly suspect of a formal contractarianism. And it is precisely any such formal contractarianism that Bonald opposed, thinking it to be at the origin of the notion that man can take it upon himself to make or unmake society. So, if language is neither a fortuitous act of nature nor the conscious, deliberate and voluntary contrivance of man, where are the origins of language to be sought?

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<sup>212</sup> *Recherches philosophiques*. Chapter 2: *De l’origine du langage*, p.71.

Man could not have invented language because the putative act of inventing language would require prior thinking and naming of the idea and concept of language itself, or at least, an intention of doing something as yet nameless but necessary. Doubtless, the intention of a nameless idea would render the expression and communication of the same difficult, if not impossible. In addition, the invention of language would also have required a tacit agreement upon an existing system of pre-linguistic signs, whose origins would, in turn, need to be determined. Thus, no man or group of men could be said to have invented language as such, for it seems that as long as there has been man, there has been language as well, and the quest for its origins soon falls into a series of regressive steps that inevitably lead to the event of man's emergence or creation. The origins of man as a social and speaking animal were bound together, or rather, the origin of language are to be sought in the origins of man. It could be that the generation of language would have automatically accompanied the spontaneous development of man's natural faculties. But the language thus generated would have been confined to the description of man's natural needs and environments. Such an original language would have ignored the entire domain of ideas and of moral beliefs without which human society itself would not have been able to survive. It would also have been a language that was essentially pictorial, or exclusively made of images, that could refer to things but not ideas. It is impossible that God would have created man and left him without the benefit of an insight in his own nature and the nature of the world, and without the capacity to express it. The creation of man by God was, therefore, according to Bonald, also accompanied by a revelation of God to man. It should be noted, however, it is not Bonald's concern and purpose to give what might be taken to be a historical account of the circumstances of this primitive revelation. Rather, while he alludes to a possible, if not probable, chain of events, it is the logical demonstration of the necessity of the revelation that is prioritised<sup>213</sup>.

Accordingly, in the "*Législation primitive*", the belief in the creation of the world, including that of man, is the starting point for the elaboration of the Bonaldian social philosophy: it is the direct application of methodical belief, against the Enlightenment hermeneutic of suspicion and doubt. For Bonald, while God has endowed man with an intellect together with all that is requisite to lead an intellectual life, the development of man's reason is adventitious in the sense of requiring an external impulse in order to be fully active or operative. The first created human being would not have attained to any knowledge of the truth if he had been left alone and untutored, for he would have had no concept of the truth, or of knowledge, beyond the raw

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<sup>213</sup> Cf. *Recherches philosophiques*. Chapter 2: *De l'origine du langage*, pp.87-93.

data from sense-perception and mere animal instinct. For Bonald defines truth as the knowledge of beings and of their relations among themselves, while reason, defined as the knowledge of truth, is the intellect in the state of illumination by truth<sup>214</sup>. It is the knowledge of truth that nurtures man's reason and provides it intellect with positive content. It is not so much that man can or, indeed, does discover truth by the sole light of his reason, as it is truth that, in the first place, precisely in a primitive or original sense, enlightens, nurtures and directs the reason of man and makes it active. Bonald believes that it is the divine reason that illumines man's intellect and communicates to him the knowledge of his own thoughts through their linguistic expression. The first man first received knowledge from God in the manner of a revelation or of a teaching that was orally and verbally transmitted and taught, as even, throughout history down to our own day, parents instruct their children and schoolmasters instruct their pupils. Bonald emphasises here the authority of this primitive revelation as an expression of the authority of God himself who instructs mankind in an infallible manner through speech and language. If God is the first cause of language, man, in turn, became the secondary cause, fulfilling in the context of the domestic society, the functions and duties of procreation and (basic) education<sup>215</sup>.

From this Bonald argues that wherever man is endowed with speech and wherever the use of language is to be found, the knowledge of a being superior to man, the name of that being, and the external worship of that being, are also to be found. There is a correlation between the universality of languages and the universal belief in a deity. The differences and diversity of languages does not preclude the commonalty of the idea of the deity, even though the conceptions of the same differ. How, then, are the differences in the conceptions of being to be explained? The primitive revelation of the deity and of the duties concerning relations with the deity and among men was secured in man through the original illumination, the subsequent illuminations (implied in the process of education) and the exercise of his reason. It was reason that made him understand the general dispensation of the divine will, through providential actions, with respect to the world and to creatures. Man had a notion of his will and actions, and, therefore, imagined that God willed and acted in a manner similar, if not identical, to his own. The purely rational attributes of God were, then, given anthropomorphic forms that corresponded to the structure of human actions, and other anthropomorphic properties such as passions and emotions. Later, the attributes were to be also given zoomorphic forms in general.

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<sup>214</sup> *Législation primitive*. Book 1, chapter III, p.298.

<sup>215</sup> *Ibid.* Book1, chapter IV, p.304.

This alteration of the primitively pure idea of God through an imaginative interpretation and re-ascription of the divine attributes is itself at the origin of idolatry and of the diversity of sects and religions. Here, Bonald mentions the Greeks who so “*disfigured the idea of the deity that their wise men, failing to recognise it any longer, chose to deny its existence*”.<sup>216</sup>

Man and societies can only attain their natural perfection if they succeed in preserving the correct knowledge of God and the accompanying ethical system. Language, or speech - the spoken word - is the privileged means for the transmission of such knowledge. Bonald believed that there was a correlation between the state of man and society, and the knowledge of truth: “*it is not the progress of civilisation that develops the knowledge of truth; but it is the knowledge of truth that hastens the progress of civilisation*”.<sup>217</sup> Progress, for him, is nothing but the pursuit of truth in view of perfection. It is not that truths change, but that they are developed, the extent of their application is better understood. For Bonald, progress and development are not qualitative measures of change, but quantitative ones, in the service of the common perfection of man and society. In the beginning, the primitive revelation was communicated only to one family, and people, and then, only was it extended to others. The truth given at the beginning was not lesser than what it became in later stages- rather, it was more compact, in accord with the needs of the times, and of the humans to whom it was communicated<sup>218</sup>. The development of truth does not mean that truth is better explained, but rather, that it is expounded and interpreted in greater detail. Such an understanding of progress is also eminently related to the idea of tradition: as human families expand and grow, they carry within themselves the truth received in the primitive revelation and transmit them to succeeding generations.

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<sup>216</sup> *Législation Primitive*, Book 1, chapter IV, p.306.

<sup>217</sup> *Ibid.* Book 1, chapter VIII, p.334.

<sup>218</sup> A comparable idea may be found in Eric Voegelin's works, especially *Order and History* (all the volumes) for whom human knowledge moves from a state of simplicity and compactness to one of greater differentiation and complexity, in the historical elucidation of the order of the world.

## **Chapter 5**

### **Bonald's Political Theology: Summary and Appraisals**

#### **A. Summary of Bonald's System**

The foregoing exposition of the main features of the works of Louis de Bonald was by no means intended to encompass the totality of his thought, but rather, to give an outline of his

system in relation to the theologico-political themes outlined in the prolegomena. The fundamental features may be described as consisting in a theological philosophy of society that aims at justifying a certain hierarchical idea of a social and religious order in contradistinction with all other “*orders*” that tend to negate or subvert hierarchical order. This hierarchical idea finds its source in divine revelation, supernatural and natural, and manifests itself in a social form that is common to all types of properly-constituted natural societies. This form organises itself in a triad of persons at every degree of such societies. Individuals do not exist as such – for individuals to exist, that is, to have a social existence, they need to be endowed with social personhood, which is given to man at the time of his birth. Therefore, it is not the individual that is the fundamental datum of society, it is society, as a form that precedes the individual, granting him the membership of a human community. The rights and obligations of the individual are the rights of an ordinary (in the numerical sense) social person in relation to his state in society, which is determined by his relation to other social persons. The hierarchical social form is a three-tiered system that is universal and common to all societies, including the universe in its relations to its own transcendent cause.

Thus, in all human societies, there is an invariable structure of social persons comprising of the power, the minister and the subject. In the domestic society of the family, the father is the power, the mother is the minister, and the children are the subjects. In the political society, the king is the power, the nobles form the ministry, and the people constitute the mass of subjects. In the religious society, God himself is the power, the clergy is the ministry, and the non-clerical faithful are the subjects. The union of the religious and political societies is referred to as the civil society, in which the care for the conservation or preservation of man both in his spiritual and physical natures is pursued. The social form itself, in its hierarchical ternary structure, is ordained toward the conservation of social person, and of human society as a whole. The monarchical character of this form proceeds from the monarchy of God, who alone, possesses and enjoys sovereignty. The monarch in the political society is but the minister of God’s sovereignty. But the monarchy of God is not itself a regime of undetermined and arbitrary will. On the contrary, the divine freedom is expressed in the motive in God for creation: namely, that he should be known and loved by beings other than himself; which beings will be called to share in his eternal beatitude. Therefore, God wills and provides not only for the creation of such beings but also for their preservation. The providence of God, therefore, informs the entire universe, including human society. The organisation of public society is ordained to the natural benefit of the subjects, for the establishment of peace and the



repression of impulses and passions that do not agree with the proximate end of social preservation; similarly, the organisation of religious society is ordained to the spiritual or supernatural benefit of the believers in view of a spiritual or spiritual end – the final end of society with God in eternity.

The invariable structure of the social form corresponds to the true and natural constitution of societies, which is distinct from the form of government a society may assume. Constituted societies are those in which the form of government is based upon the social form, while non-constituted societies are those in which the one seeks to diverge from the other. Revolutions can overturn the forms of government but they cannot affect the social form. Even in the most democratic government, the ternary structure would remain, to the extent that, beneath the official and legal allocation and division of “*powers*” and responsibilities, the power, ministers and subjects could be identified. The diffuse model of power promoted by modern democracies make it difficult not so much to specify the burden of responsibility as to find the locus of the exercise of power, and to retrace the structure of decision. The abstract proposition of popular sovereignty conceals the natural constitution of political societies by putting forth an artificial order based upon a particular understanding of representation. As it was seen in the *Prolegomena*, Schmitt’s definition of sovereignty as decision tries to unconceal the real, underlying structure of power. Bonald’s account is not one that relies or promotes legal fictions but, rather, one that seeks to uncover them, and expose the disjunction between the political doctrine of the revolutionaries and the actual state of society.

The truth of man’s social nature is, therefore, inseparable, from a politics of truth that constantly seeks the conservation of society. This conservation occurs in a juridical framework that ensures the freedom of families, of corporate bodies, and of their members. Coercion is to be used in the cases where the individual sets himself up against the general will, which is also, the general reason of society. It belongs to the magistrates, therefore, to devise those means aimed at punishing those who would only follow their own depraved wills at the expense of the general will, which is entirely ordained to the preservation of society. This effectively denies the modern doctrine of the autonomy of the individual and of politics. Thus, the social form is prior and superior to the political form, which derives its legitimacy from the former. Similarly, only those political laws are legitimate that express in a political form pre-existing social norms. In other words, the legitimacy of the laws of city derives from their conformity to the laws of nature. The social, and therefore, the political state of man is a natural state, already constituted by virtue of its cause, or God, and in view of its end, or conservation. The

social or political state is not a human contrivance that can be changed at will. The immutability of political laws proceeds from the immutability of natural laws, themselves, the expression of God's immutable will.

But man, an isolated man, could never with any certainty discover God's will on his own, unaided by the knowledge of his own thoughts and ideas. A putative man left on a desert island from birth could not arrive at any knowledge of right and wrong unless aided by a supernatural grace. It is in society, through the medium of speech and education, that man gains the knowledge of the first things and of the social facts. Man is endowed with such a knowledge in potential, in the form of the inchoate ideas, implanted in him at the moment of his creation. For these ideas to be made present to him, he must be taught to recognise and enunciate the sounds that correspond to the ideas. For Bonald, the notion of a natural light of reason whereby man would be able to know God naturally implies that the stranded man on the desert island could not know God naturally, unaided either by supernatural grace or by intercourse with fellow humans. Meaningful language is available to man only in social intercourse; it is transmitted and given to him together with the knowledge of the first things or principles, including the laws of social life and the rights, duties and obligations pertaining to it. This knowledge was first transmitted orally, in the primitive revelation from the deity to the first man and the first family, and then, within successive generations of families, and only subsequently put to writing. The function of external social authority was to enable men to name the ideas, contained in his mind, and know their objects.

Bonald held that the laws of the Hebrews were the oldest and the most perfect among the ancient legal codes. Their revealed character together with their recognition of, and agreement with, natural laws and natural justice was a proof of the truth of the Jewish religion, which was subsequently fulfilled in the Christian religion. While both religions have had laws that were either harsh or imperfect, they never advocated laws that were against nature. What abuses were to be found there were tempered by the general adherence and commitment to natural laws. The knowledge and transmission of the natural laws is less perfect in other civilisations and nations where deviations from the natural law are, if not only tolerated, but also entrenched in the social system. In the Jewish and Christian societies, the truth of the divine and supernatural revelation and the truth of the primitive and natural revelation combined, the former in aid of the latter, to maintain the knowledge and practice of natural laws.

The patriarchal, monogamous and materially independent family was the basic unit where the social form and the natural laws were made manifest. It was the family, thus conceived, that was at once the receptacle and channel of the primitive revelation, as much as it was called to be the domestic church. There, the authority of the father held everything together, with the ministrations of the mother, for the sake of the children. The pre-political state, for Bonald, is still a natural and social one, in which a centralised and properly political government is yet to be found. It is the native state that precedes the congregation of all families in a given territory under the authority of one man (himself the paterfamilias in his own family) according to the providence of God. The transmission of knowledge, as said earlier, was in view of the inculcation and fulfilment of those duties necessary for the order and survival of society. However, in societies, where the memory and transmission of the contents of the primitive revelation was perverted, novel notions regarding the social order emerged. This threw society into confusion, at the same time that intervening political upheavals led to the questioning of the traditional forms of governments. Doubt was thrown not only on the debased ideas of religion that managed to be preserved, but also on the possibility of natural moral principles as such. Philosophy emerged as an attempt to regain the lost truths through discussion and debate. It is this notion of philosophy that emerged in the 5<sup>th</sup> century B.C. in Athens amid the decline of Athenian power, similar also to that which would arise from the Renaissance onwards culminating in the Enlightenment. This notion of philosophy as endless discussion and debate was opposed by Bonald for whom the true love of wisdom consisted in the submission of the intellect to the authority of reason and the reason of authority.

## **B. Bonald's Critics**

### **i. Maine de Biran (1766 -1824)**

Maine de Biran's critique of Bonald may be found in a collection of fragmentary and unfinished studies entitled "*Examen critique des opinions de M. de Bonald*".<sup>219</sup> His reactions were mostly occasioned by the publication by Bonald's "*Recherches Philosophiques*" in 1818. Maine de Biran started his philosophical career as an adherent to Condillac's sensualism but eventually came to reject it. He was more drawn towards the introspective analysis of the mental epistemological processes, and gave himself over to the study of philosophical psychology. He opposed Bonald on three fronts: on the question of the definition of man, that is, of

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<sup>219</sup> For an account of Maine de Biran's thought in general, see Frederick Copleston, SJ, *A History of Philosophy*, vol.IX, New York: Doubleday, 1975. The "*Examen critique des opinions de M. de Bonald*" is in volume III of the *Œuvres Inédites* of Maine de Biran (Paris: Dezobry, E. Magdeleine et Compagnie, 1859).

anthropology, on that of the origin of language, and finally, in a defence of philosophy as he understood it.

### **Anthropology**

Maine de Biran's starting point is Bonald's claim in the *Recherches Philosophiques* that "*Man is an intellect served by organs*". The expression "*rational animal*" would have been appropriate as it does more justice to man's dual nature, in that it does not reduce one element to the other, or draw too great a distinction between the two<sup>220</sup>. Man, thus, is not primarily an intellect, or intellectual being, but is first endowed with life, with senses, and is called to move from a sensual existence to a more intellectual one. Maine de Biran's psychology placed great emphasis on life in general and in the vital element of human existence, in particular. Any definition of man, must first include that which is immediately perceptible, which for Maine de Biran, is also temporally prior – namely, that man is a living being with a body, endowed with animal life. It is animal life that makes intellectual life possible, by providing it with a physiological support without which it could not exist, or be perceived, in the natural world, and still less, in society.

Besides the question of the priority of the intellectual life, there is also that of the actual control exerted by the mind, or the self, as Maine de Biran puts it, over the body, in its every individual limb and in the coordination of its actions. It was far from certain that the self could exert such a control at all. The will is, in fact, rather powerless to exert any power either on all the organs of the body or upon physiological processes as a whole: there were limits to the extent of its control over the body. Rather, that which appears to move man to action seems to be the need to prolong the animal life in him, and it is in the service of such an end that the powers of the intellect are deployed. Man would appear to be a living organism served by the intellect. However, the latter can not only serve the physiological organisation of man, but it can also oppose it, if not lead it to some harm. It would be better if Bonald had recognised that man's intellect makes use of only a few select organs, and that there can be some coordination between the activities of the self and the activities of the body. Main de Biran effectively reproaches Bonald of not having taken sufficient notice of the possible exceptions and internal inconsistencies that would have invalidated his definition of man. One such inconsistency for

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<sup>220</sup> Maine de Biran, *Examen critique des opinions de M. de Bonald*, pp.220-221.

him was that it could not both be that man is an intellectual being served by organs and that his intellectual nature is only revealed to himself by the external agency of society.

Maine de Biran, therefore, criticism implies that the human act of self-awareness is one in which the human self comes to the awareness both of its inner life – the life of mind – and of its external, or physical life. At the same time, the physical life may undergo such troubles that are beyond the control of the inner life, and of the will, such as disease, suffering and incapacitating physical conditions in general. The definition, therefore, cannot be accepted. The analogy that Bonald establishes between man and society, wherein the individual intellect and the organs are proportionally in the same relation as the public power to its ministers cannot be accepted either.

### **Origins of Language**

Regarding the question of the origins of language, Maine de Biran thought that Bonald's solution was hasty and rather unphilosophical insofar as it negated the hypothesis of a possible human creation of language by having recourse to a divine primitive revelation<sup>221</sup>. It is not clear, in Bonald, how this revelation takes place, and yet, he resigns himself to it. Acknowledging a putative miraculous origin of language – for so Maine de Biran understood the primitive revelation – does not preclude one from continuing to inquire into the lower levels of the causation of language, or even, into different, if not contrary, hypotheses. Bonald himself is not settled upon any stable explanation as to of how the primitive revelation could have happened, contenting himself with affirming its axiomatic necessity.

For Maine de Biran, the record of divine revelation itself, that is, the Scriptures, does not categorically mention the means, supernatural or not, that God might have employed to communicate his will and his laws to man. Even if it be conceded that God might have used words to communicate with Adam, the Scriptures are silent regarding whether the words thus used were the elements of a prototypical language from which all other human languages were derived. The mode of divine communications to men is signally crucial here. For what Bonald does not define language, or rather, takes it to encompass the widest possible transmission of meaningful from one person (be it the deity) to another, who is presumed to be incapable of creating languages. But if the latter is incapable of creating them, the very fact of his being able to be taught to speak indicates a natural disposition towards language. Granted that in Bonald's

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<sup>221</sup> Maine de Biran, op.cit., pp.231-232.

system, the emergence of language and the infusion of moral ideas in man both precede the strictly social state of man, the need, then, is not so much for a direct divine gift of language as for the activation of a capacity for language.

Bonald also seems to overlook the fact the deity may use other means to communicate with men. For Maine de Biran, the external character of the transmission and knowledge of moral laws overlooks the inner life and its role in the moral development of man. By externalising to a significant extent the communications of God with man, Bonald actually contributes to lessen the legitimately mysterious, if not mystical, aspect of religion. If the diversity of opinions and debates among men about the physical realities of the world could not endanger nature, it is conceivable that debates and discussions upon moral issues could not either threaten the moral realm. Maine de Biran here seeks to disentangle the issues of the origins and development of languages, together with that of the emergence of philosophy (as Bonald sees it), from the notion of decline or progress of morality throughout history. While no one could conceive that one or a few men could have single-handedly created all the languages of mankind, the possibility remains that the vast system of languages may have evolved over time before attaining more or less comparative levels of sophistication. Maine de Biran maintains that Bonald has not sufficiently disproved this latter hypothesis, and that, in view of the other difficulties of his doctrine on language, the question is far from settled.

## **Philosophy**

Maine de Biran's main difficulty with Bonald is in relation to the latter's views on the history and developments of philosophy. Bonald's condemnations of philosophy reposes first, upon the idea that philosophy emerged as a substitute for religion when men had come to lose faith in religious doctrines as a consequence of the forgetfulness of the primitive revelation, leading to the degeneration of religions<sup>222</sup>. This implied that those without philosophy had either maintained a connection with the divine sources of knowledge, or were still in a sort of native state. It reposes also upon the idea that the dissensions and variations in philosophy are a proof of its incapacity as attaining to any truth. Here, Bonald applies a typical trope of Catholic apologetics against Protestants (illustrated by Bossuet): the variation of Protestant sects is a proof of the falsehood of the Protestant creed. A third element of Bonald's condemnation is

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<sup>222</sup> Cf. Chapter 4A.

one which was relevant to his immediate historical circumstances: the alliance of philosophy (that is, philosophers) with the forces of revolutionary subversion.

Maine de Biran interprets the first point as being confined strictly to the positive divine revelation to the Hebrews. Everything regarding the Hebrew pertains, he argues, to a supernatural dispensation, and not to the natural state of society. The pursuit and cultivation of wisdom is not dependent upon either a supernatural dispensation or the elaboration and communication of metaphysical systems. Philosophy, itself, as the universal quest for wisdom, could not be reduced to systems that have either usurped or are unworthy of its name. The whole perspective of Bonald on the history of philosophy in the *Recherches Philosophiques* is vitiated, according to Maine de Biran, by this particular confusion that permeates that the treatise in question<sup>223</sup>. Diversity of opinion regarding metaphysical, moral and human affairs is inevitable. The dialectical opposition of ideas and opinions is necessary not only for the elucidations of the fundamental problems of any metaphysical science, but also, more simply, for the exercise of reason in the most quotidian of circumstances. The unsolvable antinomies and aporiae of metaphysics serve to show the limits of that science. Maine de Biran stressed “*that metaphysics had nothing to say about the objects or the beliefs that transcend the bounds of the physical world, without ceasing at the same time to be universal or common to all mankind*”.<sup>224</sup> These objects or beliefs were available and known to conscience, or to inmost sentiment of man. The assent of man to revelation and to moral ideas depends not so much (if at all) upon rational discourse, but upon the formation of conscience by the divine truths. Conscience is where the voice of God is heard, or rather, it is itself the voice of God in man. These ideas on the limits of metaphysics are reminiscent of certain central elements of Kant’s system, which Maine de Biran praises as having put theological and moral truths out of the reach of critical reasoning, thereby preserving them. By insisting on the apodictic rationality of the truths of the religious and moral world, Bonald does not help, as it were, the cause of these truths, which would be better served, if they were acknowledged to lie strictly within the compass of the individual conscience. For Maine de Biran, it is of the nature of a revelation, whether internal or external, that its content should elude the purview of rational demonstration. Universal and general facts are not necessarily derived from a universal reason, nor can they be rationally explained. Any reason underlying them escapes the grasp of human reason, or

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<sup>223</sup> Maine de Biran, op.cit., p.92.

<sup>224</sup> Maine de Biran, op.cit, p.93.

rather, it is only in the secret of the conscience that any reconciliation between reason and revelation can take place.

For Maine de Biran, the purpose of Bonald in the “*Recherches Philosophiques*” was more rhetorical, even sophistical, than properly discursive or scientific. It was a polemical book intended, after the French Revolution, to discredit a particular understanding of philosophy that was deemed to be sceptical of traditional order, of religious dogmas and of morality. Bonald, according to him, sought to vindicate faith over and against reason, and in the process, proceeded to humiliate human reason by showing and exaggerated the weakness and confusion of philosophy (through an overly schematic presentation of its history). Maine de Biran does not concern himself much with the social or external aspect of him; for him, philosophy, or the task of philosophy, comprises almost entirely in the act of being conscious of the inner life, and of making the inner life agree with the external one. His fundamental disposition is towards a highly psychological, if not, mystical, individualism that privileges conscience over and above the external order as a reliable source of knowledge.

## **ii. Ventura de Raulica (1792-1861)**

Gioacchino Ventura de Raulica (thereafter Ventura) was a Sicilian priest and philosopher who took to exile in France after the fall of the Roman Republic (1849) in the government of which he had occupied a somewhat prominent position. He was invited to give conferences in Paris in 1851 on the subject of the contrast between non-Christian and Christian philosophy<sup>225</sup>, or as he himself put it between “*philosophical reason*” and “*Catholic reason*”. He was well acquainted with the thought of Bonald whom he quoted several times in the course of the conferences. His appreciation for Bonald was not, however, uncritical. The relevance of Ventura’s critique was that it was performed from the perspective of Thomism, at a time when Scholasticism was only just entering a phase of revival, after approximately three centuries of stagnation and retreat from the arena of philosophical discourse and debate. Ventura, himself, through his books, conferences and sermons contributed to prepare the ground for this revival.

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<sup>225</sup> Gioacchino Ventura de Raulica. *La raison philosophique et la raison catholique*. Paris: Gaumes Frères 1851. Ventura’s criticism of Bonald in this book would lead to a polemical correspondence with one of the latter’s son, Vicomte Victor de Bonald, at the issue of which Ventura published a summary of the correspondence, including a more thorough critique of Bonald’s entire oeuvre: *De la vraie et fausse philosophie: en réponse a une lettre de monsieur le Vicomte Victor de Bonald*. Paris: Gaumes Frères 1852.



In the second of his Parisian conferences of 1851, Ventura introduces a distinction between “*inquisitive philosophy*” on the one hand and “*demonstrative philosophy*” on the other. Both types of philosophies profess to seek the truth. However, for Ventura, inquisitive philosophy has always started from doubt and scepticism, and rejected any truth that it did not itself discover, whereas demonstrative philosophy embraces truth when and where it is found<sup>226</sup>. The modern philosophies Descartes and Bacon, with their common starting point in doubt, together with the other inquisitive philosophies of the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> century would lead to the propagation of scepticism not only with respect to religious dogma but also in relation to moral and political truths. The philosophers of those centuries must each be condemned for their presumption to rebuild philosophy on allegedly new grounds. Bonald does not escape Ventura’s criticism. In his own notes to the conference, Ventura quotes the beginning of the first chapter of the “*Recherches Philosophiques*” where Bonald announces his project of renewing philosophy, citing it as an example of the presumption of inquisitive philosophers. For Bonald not only rejected the rationalistic philosophy that was associated with the revolutionary movement, but also the Scholastic philosophy. He did not do so because he had studied it but rather because it had become conventional, by the 18<sup>th</sup> century, to dismiss Scholastic philosophy as outdated and irrelevant. This attitude was no doubt imparted to him while he followed his studies at the College de Juilly.

While Bonald’s general aim was no doubt commendable in the desire to confute a certain Enlightenment rationalism, Ventura argues that his own exercise in inquisitive philosophy leads him to a position comparable to the rationalists insofar as he seems to reduce theology to philosophy, Catholic reason to philosophical. Ventura believes that only an authentically Christian philosophy can do justice at once to both philosophy and theology; such a philosophy will have to be demonstrative, insofar as its starting will be the truth. If only Bonald had studied and acknowledged the contribution of the Scholastics, the character of his own philosophy would have been different. This ignorance of Scholasticism together led Bonald to concede too much to the modern philosophers, especially Locke, regarding the origin of language and the production of ideas. Ideas, for Bonald, are available to us primarily through the senses of hearing and of sight; it is thanks to these senses that the mind comes to a meaningful possession of ideas, and is thus properly capable of thought<sup>227</sup>. Were it not for the doctrine of the primitive revelation, this comes rather close to Locke’s notion that all senses, not just the two mentioned,

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<sup>226</sup> Ventura, *ibid.*, p.118.

<sup>227</sup> Cf. Chapter 4B.

are the sources of ideas. To this latent, if not manifest, sensualism in Bonald, Ventura opposes the doctrine of Aquinas on abstraction and on the active intellect<sup>228</sup>. According to Aquinas, when the mind receives sensory data of things in general, phantasms are produced, that give a material image of the things. It is only from this material image that a properly rational knowledge of those things must be extracted. For the sensory knowledge of things (as images in the mind) present them only as individual and material instances of the species to which they belong. Only an active intellect can perform the abstraction of the intelligible species from the sensible species, and thus, arrive at a properly rational knowledge of reality. It is not enough only to recognise that the mind has a natural disposition to receive images, which most of the sensualist philosophers acknowledged, or that words themselves enable the mind to identify the ideas that it already contains. For this would amount to reducing the mind to a passive organ of knowledge, that relies exclusively on the active and external transmission of ideas. The difference between the capacity of receiving images from sensory experience on the one hand, and the power to abstract from them a truly rational knowledge, and to act according to this knowledge, on the other, is infinite. The natural senses and faculties, including sight, audition and speech, are only a partial, and material, cause of knowledge. It is by the active intellect that man is distinguishable from the other animals, as it is a participation in the intellectual light that originates in God himself. Speech and language are necessary above all for the formulation and expression of ideas, not for their formation. Ideas are not, in this view, innate in man, for it is the active intellect that is innate and that forms ideas. The necessity for the senses as the material cause of knowledge being established, the idea that man is an intellectual being served by organs cannot be maintained, because the union between the body and the soul is not merely accidental, it is a necessary union of two complementary substances. It is thanks to this natural and necessary union that man can know the world; it is also thanks to it that man is able to exercise his free will and be held responsible for his moral choices.

Ventura did not fail to criticise certain aspects of the properly theologico-political thought of Bonald. In *“Essai sur le pouvoir public”*,<sup>229</sup> Ventura praises Bonald as being the *“first publicist of modern times who has endeavoured to seek the origin, nature, and laws of all human society in God; who had the great and salutary thought of giving politics religion for its*

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<sup>228</sup> Ventura, op.cit., pp.179-184. Regarding the Thomist doctrine on the active intellect, Ventura relies mostly on the Summa Theologia (I, qu. 84, art. 6, qu.79, art.4) and the Commentary on De Anima (book 2, section. 4).

<sup>229</sup> Ventura. *Essai sur le pouvoir public, ou Exposition des lois naturelles de l'ordre social*. Paris: Gaumes Frères et J Duprey 1859.

*foundation*”.<sup>230</sup> The high, and somewhat stilted praise, is accompanied by a thorough critique of Bonald’s very definition of society as the union of similar beings in view of their common reproduction and conservation. This definition of society cannot be applied, according to Ventura, either to God, to the angels, or to those who have given up the natural duties of reproduction for the sake of religious profession (clerics, monks, nuns, etc.). It is, therefore, a definition that is deficient in universality, conceiving of society in strictly materialistic terms. Ventura does not seem to have shared Bonald’s own views on heredity, which can be both material and spiritual, or that, the conservation of society is not only for its own sake but for the sake of its own society with God. Bonald’s materialistic definition must be improved upon by introducing the notion of perfection. Thus, society is endowed with two ends corresponding to the orders of nature and grace: a natural end and a supernatural end, with the natural itself tending towards the supernatural. It is, according to Ventura, because certain publicists, conceiving society in purely materialistic terms, have ignored the distinction of the two ends that they have subsumed the supernatural end within the natural end, leading to the subsuming of religion by the state. This would ultimately lead to the neutralisation of religion, and to the subversion of the laws of nature and of nations. Society, then, must be defined as the “*concord of intellectual beings, united by a common submission to the same Power, towards the end of their conservation and perfection*”.<sup>231</sup> Ventura stresses the notion of concord as he believed that without a true and free harmony of thoughts and wills among intellectual beings, there can be no society among them either. The restriction to intellectual beings is designed to exclude mere animal brutes among whom, Ventura held, there could be no true and proper society. The requirement for a single power comes from the proposition that intellectual beings could not come together and form a durable society unless they submit and obey one common power.

Another of Ventura’s difficulties with Bonald’s system consist in the latter’s making the ternary structure of the Church as society to consist of God as power, the clergy as ministers, and the faithful as subjects. In the Church itself, the proportion of relations is as follows: the pope is to the bishops and mass of the clergy, what the bishops and the mass of the clergy are to the people. Thus, it would seem that the clericature as whole forms a society in itself- with a power (the pope), a ministry (the bishops) and the mass of the clergy (the subjects)- within the broader society of the Church, whose power is none other than God. Effectively, this scheme appears to restrict the power of the pope in the Church to the bishops and clergy only. For Ventura, this

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<sup>230</sup> Ventura, *ibid.*, p.21.

<sup>231</sup> Ventura, *ibid.*, p.6.

was redolent of the old Gallicanism that denied the pope any power over national churches, or rather, limited his power to a strictly spiritual sphere. If God, that is Jesus Christ, were the only person-power of the Church, and if the pope were only the first of his ministers, it would follow that that the Church, established and based on earth as much as the domestic and political societies, would be the only society not to have any earthly power<sup>232</sup> at its head. And if the nobles in the political state are the ministers of a visible king, it would mean that the pope is the chief minister of an invisible power. It would mean that the Church would be bereft of a visible government, of a visible and earthly head, who would be the focus of unity. It would also mean that the different parts of the Church dispersed throughout the earth and among different nations would only be loosely connected with one another, resulting in the Church being not so much a body as a confederacy of national churches and orders. Such a state of anarchy, especially touching the society founded by Jesus Christ, for the salvation of all men in the domestic and political societies, is not compatible with the nature and the purpose of the Church. Such a state of anarchy was patently noticeable among the official Protestant churches where there was no visible head, except the prince of the nation. While not doubting the sincerity of the motives of Bonald, Ventura here censures what he deems to be a Gallicanism that is not only wrong in its principles (and inconsistent with the rest of Bonald's "ecclesiology") but that was also complicit in the takeover of the Church by the State during the revolutionary period. If Bonald's own social form is followed in its ternary logic, it is the pope (under God, of course) who is the visible power in the Church. The monarchical principle of power is the same for all states of society, including the Church. This power is exercise as a delegation of God's sovereignty, who does not exercise direct rule over societies. Ventura ventures to argue that to deny the power of the pope over the Church is tantamount to denying the power of the king over the state, and of the father over the family. The natural necessity of a ternary constitution of society must be maintained for all types of societies. The Gallican infelicities of Bonald's doctrine, however, do not constitute the main body of his doctrine on the relations of Church and State. As was seen in the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Chapters, Bonald held that both were to remain distinct from one another within the broader "*civil society*". This would raise the question of an ultimate arbiter of such a civil society, one that would adjudicate in the disputes between the two societies. The belief, held both by Ventura and Bonald, that it is religion that constitutes or founds the state, would probably require, for the resolution of such a question, that the papacy be recognised as the ultimate arbiter of the disputes, not only

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<sup>232</sup> Cf. Ventura, *Essai sur le pouvoir public*, p.26.

between the religious and the political societies, but also, among political societies themselves. This would fall in line with the doctrine of Aquinas that Ventura sought to revive.

The subsequent promulgation of the dogmatic constitution *Dei Filius* at the First Vatican Council can be seen as a significant step in the revival of Scholasticism. Indeed, the doctrine according to which it is possible that man through the light of natural reason could attain to a sure knowledge of God was promulgated as a dogmatic truth that was binding upon all Catholics. From the perspective of the official magisterium of the Church, this was a definitive act settling a centuries-old dispute. The constitution not only affirmed the possibility of the knowledge of God through the light of natural reason but also maintained the distinction but ultimate agreement between the realms of reason and faith. Fergus Kerr has pointed out that a study of the phrasing of the constitution should not lead to over-hasty conclusions about the contents being strictly reflective of Thomist doctrines<sup>233</sup>. While one of the drafters (the Jesuit theologian Kleutgen) of the document was instrumental in the subsequent Scholastic renewal, the concerns of some of the conciliar fathers seem to have been to ascertain whether the new constitution agreed with certain traditionalistic principles, such as the indispensability of society, language and tradition. Kerr argues that this is directly attributable to the influence of Bonald. The natural capacity of human reason to know God was thus declared to be a capacity qualified and limited by its possibility. This qualification was not only necessary in view of the prevalence of the traditionalist views but also because the question whether the reason of a fallen nature, yet unredeemed by grace, could possibly attain to such knowledge was still not settled. Nevertheless, the document could still be seen as a landmark in the renewal of Christian philosophy after the disorders of the Enlightenment and revolutionary periods. Not only does it single out the rationalism and the sensualism of the preceding centuries for condemnation, but it also seems to tacitly acknowledge, if not the truth, but the concern about the social aspect of knowledge and revelation that was at the heart of the traditionalist critique.

### **iii. Henri de Lubac s.j. (1896-1991)**

Unlike the authors mentioned above, Henri de Lubac did not devote himself to any lengthy and meticulous analysis and criticism of the works of Bonald<sup>234</sup>. Rather, the latter is briefly mentioned and criticised in the course of Lubac's survey of the heresy of Baianism in his

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<sup>233</sup> Fergus Kerr o.p. *Knowing God by reason alone: what Vatican I never said*. New Blackfriars Vol.91, No.1033 (May 2010), pp.215-228.

<sup>234</sup> This apparently did not prevent Lubac from using Bonald's system as a foil to his own notion of Catholic philosophy and theology: see Eric de Moulins-Beaufort. *Anthropologie et mystique selon Henri de Lubac*. Paris: Editions du Cerf 2003.

theological treatise, *“Augustinisme et théologie moderne”*.<sup>235</sup> Baianism had a very restrictive view of the whole system of grace – for Baius, the purpose of sanctifying grace was not so much to purify man and lead him to the knowledge of God as to enable him to fulfil his natural duties. Original sin had impaired man’s capacity to do so, and the whole economy of salvation consists precisely in what Lubac considers to be the quasi-juridical fulfilment of commandments and laws. The supernatural end of man is either ignored or conflated with his natural ends. The work of grace in man, therefore, aims not so at the restitution of the divine image in man, as in making him able to fulfil external acts of justice. It is on the grounds of this extrinsicism that Lubac would fain find a kinship between baianism and what he terms a *“rigid traditionalism”*.

Here, he draws an analogy between the Baianist extrinsicist understanding of justification and the Bonaldian doctrine of an external and primitive revelation. The supernatural help is to the discharge of natural duties what the primitive revelation is to the act of knowing. For Lubac, this inverts the proper order of things, whereby nature is ordained to the supernatural, and not supernatural to nature. In both cases, it seems that the transcendence of the supernatural and of divine revelation is compromised by the purely instrumental use to which they are put in the pursuit of natural perfections. The fundamental perspective of Bonaldian traditionalism seems to be one where the necessity of the supernatural is confined to the constitution of man and in providing an authoritative basis for a traditionalist understanding of his nature and activities. Lubac also extends the parallel, without going into further details, with the manner in which social traditionalism conceives of the relations of Church and State. It is plausible that it is a brand of traditionalism associated with the Action Française that is directly in cause here. For this sort of traditionalism, it was not so much the truth of religion as its social value that commends it as an essential component of social and political action. Religion was seen essentially as a civilising force of tremendous value to the moral life of society, and not the supernatural society of Christ, in which salvation was offered and the beatific vision of God promised. There is no doubt that there is much in common between Baianism and this purely instrumental understanding of the Church. The question nevertheless remains to ascertain whether such a purely instrumental and naturalistic view is to be found in Bonald himself, or if a modified traditionalism, say a Thomist traditionalism, such as that of Ventura opens itself to such a charge.

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<sup>235</sup> Henri de Lubac. *Augustinisme et théologie moderne*. Lyon: Editions Montaigne 1965, pp.20-21.

#### iv. John Milbank (1952- )

It is in the context of a critique of positivism and of the social sciences that Milbank enters into a discussion of the ideas of Bonald<sup>236</sup>. Bonald, together with Maistre, is presented as a forerunner of the positivist turn in the methodology of the then nascent social sciences. Already then, they “understood their social theories as strictly scientific, although they also regarded them as theological”.<sup>237</sup> Bonald, therefore, presents his work as a “*secular theology*” that uses the same discursive or positive method used by the sceptics of the Enlightenment to vindicate the truths that they denied. Thus, Bonald, far from advancing the cause of theology, on the contrary, helps to subsume within the domain of sociological discourse. The limited gains of trying to defeat the sceptics on their own grounds is offset by a capitulation to a method that is intrinsically linked to scepticism. Similarly, the capacity of man to know the natural law is reduced to the knowledge of the external manifestation of these laws in social institutions. This neglect of introspection amounts to a sociologisation of the natural law. But this is also accompanied by an immanentisation of the idea of revelation: it is not only divine and supernatural communications that can earn the name of revelation. As much as the natural was primitively revealed, the Christian revelation itself became natural.

Milbank endeavours to show the connection between these formal aspects of Bonald’s thought and the legacy of Cartesian philosophy, most notably, as developed by Malebranche. It is under the spell of the latter’s philosophy, explains Milbank, that Bonald came to understand the *idées générales* or general ideas not so much as predicaments or categories of being, as taught by the Scholastics, but rather in terms of a “very ‘general’ particularity of interrelationship and coordination of function”<sup>238</sup> that is expressed in the social fact. Ultimately, Bonald’s social metaphysics leads to an identification of society with the form of law. In relation to the last point, Milbank thinks that the theme of this identification persists in the later sociologists such as Comte and Durkheim. Beyond them, it is probable that the identification or a modification thereof also came to influence jurisprudence or rather a specific form of juridical thinking which could be associated with Carl Schmitt.

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<sup>236</sup> John Milbank. *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason*. 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing 2006.

<sup>237</sup> Milbank, *ibid.*, p.55.

<sup>238</sup> Milbank, *ibid.*, p.58.





### **A Last Word: Bonald's Contribution, or Social Analogy**

It must be distressing situation when a researcher, enthusiastically setting out to articulate the particular contributions of an author to a particular field, realises that the criticisms laid against his author's thoughts are actually valid and deserve to be taken into consideration. At first glance, a conflict seems to appear, pitting the researcher's admiration, if not veneration, for his author against the demands of academic science. However, the present writer believes that the recognition of the validity of criticism is itself an occasion for delineating an honest picture of the author, which could only enrich academic science. In the face of the validity of the criticism, and notwithstanding the legitimacy of extenuating circumstances, the question of an author's positive contributions takes root in a truly ethical praxis of this science, beyond any cultivation of sophistry.

Ventura, having been an avid reader of Bonald in his youth and ever after retaining a certain veneration for him, no doubt found himself in a situation not dissimilar to that of the present writer. His subsequent immersion and education in the Thomist school enabled him to recognise, from the perspective of a traditional Christian philosophy, the strengths and the weaknesses of the Bonaldian philosophical edifice. The weaknesses were rather disconcerting, especially when a writer of the Eclectic school such as Maine de Biran also managed to identify correctly. The neglect or extreme minimisation of the interiority of man as a legitimate and active organ of knowledge is a serious defect. It leaves man entirely in the power of the external forces of society not only for his animal subsistence but also, and more importantly, for the fulfilment of his spiritual or intellectual nature. The intellect as more immediately the created image of God in man, as the reflection of a divine spark, is deprived of all its agency in the interior formation of man; the voice of conscience itself is made silent in the face of the supreme and ultimate criterion of the social fact. It could even be argued that Bonald took the mechanistic anthropology of the early modern period, and replaced the blind, indeterminate and unpersonifiable forces of nature with a God who endowed the automaton he created with motion. The need for resorting to this minimisation of the individual human's capacity for knowledge and for virtue originates in his experience of the French Revolution, in which the private and sectional interests of a few managed to gain in influence, and set out to change society in a profound subversive manner. The claims of the individuals against the system of the Ancien Régime, the war waged by Voltaire and the other liberal publicists in favour of a

more relaxed code of public conduct, together with the festering hatred the orders had toward one another led inexorably to a cycle of violence. Such violence could eventually be seen as a providential occasion for the renewal of society according to the dictates of order and reason. But the fall from a putative pre-existing order or reason had to be so patent and so profound in order for men to desire the restoration of order, and if he was so perverse as to not desire it, providence would ensure that eventually order would be restored.

One of the major contradictions of modernity was manifested in the cultivation of a scientific methodology it sought to apply to a domain which it defined as pure freedom or autonomy, which when taken to extremes, became coterminous licentiousness and arbitrariness. Man was held to be born free on terms that were incompatible with the ordered life of society, for this freedom, again was to be defined as the unimpeded concession to passions and impulses. Man left to himself, therefore, could not be free, as in the absence of authority he would surely go down the road of self-indulgence, and, ultimately, self-destruction. If man could not be relied upon to save himself, still less could society, conceived as man's contrivance, be expected to help him. As much as man left to his own devices and his passions could not attain, without some exterior help, a right knowledge of the truth, so a society that is the product of his will, could only bear the deficiencies and taint of that will. Such a society could not endure for long, for it was a negative society, that is, one that is not ordained towards its self-conservation and the conservation of its members.

This extremely negative view of man's nature as depraved was almost certainly not the result of Bonald's religious beliefs, unless it be demonstrated that he was really a Jansenist, or still, a Baianist, as Lubac would almost have it. It probably emerged as the result of the observation of the depravity of human conduct during the Revolution. If society was to be reborn and was to continue, it had to be something other than the artificial contrivance of the human will. The idea, structure and moral worth of society must pre-exist as a form in the divine mind, if not, perhaps, as a mode of the life of the deity in itself. It must be a form that out of the reach of the decay of time and depravity – it must endure even where the outward self-image and self-representation of society is something deep antithetical to it. This form must not only be out of the reach of man's will, but it must also be out of the reach of his intellect unaided by the primitive revelation. It is in society itself, and not in man, that the secret of the eternal constitution of society, with its ternary and triadic order, must remain. Man's access to it can only be mediated by society itself. It is, from the Aristotelian and Thomist point of view, only from an ignorance of the nature of the intellect that Bonald could have arrived at such a

conclusion. The intellect is not entirely passive naturally, it is also active. The effects of depravity, whether an original and transmissible one, or a constantly re-enacted one, or indeed, both together at once, could not entirely suppress the active nature of the intellect. It could perhaps at most hinder it but it could not entirely overshadow it and neutralise the possibility of its natural apprehension of God. The Aristotelian-Thomist school provides for a significant exercise of free will, in spite of the fact of man's depravity. In this sense, it secures man's dignity, understood as the dignity that proceeds from the *imago Dei* implanted in all men by virtue of their creation. The necessity for order and society, for the perfection of society, the government of the world by One, and the analogy between this government and others need not depend, as Aquinas has implicitly shown on the presupposition of man's utter weakness and inability to know naturally<sup>239</sup>. The recognition of man's weakness on his own, while entailing the prior necessity of society, does not entail that this necessity could only be made present to man, by virtue of the same weakness, by an external authority. Sufficient room must be left not merely for the active intellect but for that active intellect to be heard by man himself in the chamber of his conscience. A primitive revelation whereby God would instruct man in his state of innocency is not inconceivable but a proper account of man's natural intellectual endowments must be included in the operation of this primitive revelation.

Bonald's deficiencies in anthropology (and implicitly, with respect to the origin of language) being granted, the roll of his achievements must now be read out especially as these bear directly upon the theologico-political themes outlined in the *Prolegomena*. Milbank, in his attempt to show how thoroughly sociologising the tendencies of Bonald were, to the point of possible heterodoxy, mistakenly equates the triadic structure of society with Bonald's understanding of the Trinity. Milbank imagines that for Bonald the structure of power, minister and subject could be mapped, as it were, onto the doctrine of the Trinity: "*As the divine Logos is said to be also the ministre of God, it is clear that a certain Eusebian semi-Arianism is present here*".<sup>240</sup>

In a footnote to the 6<sup>th</sup> chapter of the "*Démonstration philosophique*",<sup>241</sup> Bonald starts from the following proposition: if the political power in society is the image and the lieutenant of the divine power, then, it is in the image that certain features of the archetype could be found.

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<sup>239</sup> Cf. Respectively *Summa contra Gentiles*, III, 81; *Summa Theologica* 1a, qu.96, art.3&4, qu.103 art.3, in A.P. d'Entreves. *Aquinas: Selected Political Writings*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell 1948, pp.99-107.

<sup>240</sup> John Milbank. *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, p.56.

<sup>241</sup> Louis de Bonald. *Démonstration philosophique du principe constitutive de la société*. Paris: Librairie Adrien Le Clere 1875, pp.463-464.

So, it is not in man, nor in society as such, but it is between the political power of society and the divine power that some analogy could be discerned. In the kingship that is constituted upon natural laws there powers are to be found: the legislative, the executive, and the administrative. There are three powers, but not three kings, rather three distinct persons in the same king. The legislative, the executive is king, and the administration, yet they are not three kings, but one king. This belief of unity in trinity and trinity in unity, without trinity of substance or confusion of persons, and of their equal majesty is professed by the Church in the Liturgy. Bonald refers here to the Preface of the Trinity, which is sung on Trinity Sundays and all Sundays after Trinity in the liturgical cycle. Bonald could also have referred to the Athanasian creed, also used in the liturgy, which contains similar expressions. It is not Bonald's purpose here to analyse, à la Kantorowicz, the application of liturgical acclamations to secular rulers, but rather, to show how an analogy obtains not between God and the world as such, but rather between God as Trinity and the inner structure of human kingship, admittedly as conceived in a formalised way in European monarchies before the age of revolutions. Of course, a critical history of the mutual influence of the phraseology of the prayers of the liturgy and the formulations of royal or imperial power, as a theologico-political theme, is extremely relevant here. Whether the analogy is in the things themselves or whether it is in the mind is somewhat immaterial for the juridical sphere where the analogy is to be seen strictly as a device guaranteeing the legitimacy of political power. Such, it can perhaps be conjectured, would have been Schmitt's opinion on the matter. What is also interesting here is that, by his recourse to the liturgy as the source of a direct analogy between the Trinity and human kingship, Bonald seems to have nullified Peterson's negation of the possibility of a truly Christian political theology. However, Bonald himself acknowledges here the epistemological limits of such an analogy, insisting that it is not meant to exhaust, but to point to the possibility of the truth of divine mysteries. This analogy between the Trinity and the kingship at once complements and transcends the other analogies drawn out of the ternary order between levels of society, by virtue of its reference to the innermost life of the Trinity about which little, beyond the scriptural witness, the creeds and the doxological expressions of the liturgy, can be known in a discursive way. It is significant, however, that Bonald should have sought the principle of his analogy in the liturgy and not in strictly speculative theological formulations. The ancient and common maxim regarding the relationship between belief and worship was that *legem credendi lex statuat supplicandi*, that is, the law of supplication or prayer establishes the law of belief. The liturgy is seen by Bonald in this instance as a legitimate source for the establishment of his analogy.

In an essay that was only recently rediscovered and for then for the first time published, Bonald pursues his analogical scheme even further<sup>242</sup>. In this unfinished work, Bonald establishes a list of dogmas that could be explained by the referring to their similarity to facts found in nature and society. It is his aim to show that, while divine revelation is truly supernatural and transcendent, yet, in order to be partially intelligible to men, it must also share some similarity with the facts and features of nature and society that men would encounter in their daily lives. Those intelligible aspects of dogmas are also to be found in a different degree or kind in the realm of everyday experience. Therefore, when dogmas are presented and explained to people, they should be presented as being familiar, and not strange. The dogmas that Bonald seeks to explain from the perspective of their analogy to certain aspects of human experience are: original sin, the Trinity, the Incarnation, the Redemption, the sacrament of confession and the evangelical counsels. Bonald here expands upon his analogy between the Trinity and the Kingship. The eternal generation of the Word from the Father is compared to the generation of royal action out of the royal will, while the procession of the Holy Ghost is likened to the procession of the royal administration equally from the royal will and from the royal action.

In the rest of the work Bonald applies a similar method to the other dogmas and sacraments by drawing upon similitudes. The identity between the dogmas of religion and the constitutive principles of society, being a similitude of their external structure and in the order of their constitutive persons, is what draws together a properly monarchy to the Catholic faith. The union of throne and altar is not accidental – it proceeds from the homology of the concepts of the external organisation of both. The alterations in the one will not fail to have repercussion upon the other. It is almost as if Bonald was inviting successive generations to study the effects of the separation of Church and State in formerly confessional countries in terms of its repercussions both upon public life and religious life.

Almost one hundred years ago, as the First World War was coming to an end, most governments in Europe were still monarchies; one form or another of religion was still publicly recognised. Today most governments are republics, with only a handful of monarchies remaining. How much has changed in the sense that Bonald understood the change from a monarchical to a republican form of government? How relevant were those changes for Europe and for the world in general, especially in the context of the Second World War? It could be that political theology is not authorised to deal with those questions by virtue of its formal

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<sup>242</sup> Louis de Bonald. *Réflexions sur l'accord des dogmes de la religion avec la raison*. Edited by Vincent Bouat, presented and analysed by Jean-Louis Pranchère. Paris: Editions du Cerf 2012.

objects – and, yet, it would be hard to deny the relevance, tacit or explicit, of theologico-political themes today. Should the liberal public and international institutions that were formed after the last World War be at all seized of a possible relevance of these themes? What are the theologico-political themes underlying the distinction between the international regime of human rights and the traditional understanding of the rights of nations? It could also be that the theologico-political form of thinking, implicit in this work, that is, a form of thinking that refuses to capitulate to the postmodernist nominalism regarding the essence of things, is itself obsolete and incapable of rising to the task of thinking a future of ever-increasing technical conquest and technocratic control. Is there any space in politics for a truly conservative thought that insists on the necessity of the limitation of arbitrary political power for the sake of the conservation of society? For too long perhaps, the conservative mind-set or thought has been associated with the primacy of private interests over public interest, and has sponsored a privatised vision of the common good. Such a vision no doubt had its validity in a land-based, agrarian society where the private interests of the landowners was commensurate to a degree with the local common good. To a significant extent, the materially independent family, able to perpetuate itself with material security over many generations, that Bonald envisioned to be the model domestic society perhaps does not exist anymore in the same numbers as it did in his time.

No romantic vision, however comforting in its desire for rational politics, is a substitute for the rational contemplation of politics. In an ideal scheme of political theology, the latter can only be founded upon both an attentive contemplation and a discursive apprehension of being, the two being mediated by a personal ethic of conformity to the higher ideals of civilisation. But perhaps this is not enough, perhaps this ethic of conformity needs to be supplemented by one of obedience to set of transcendent norms in which even political norms find their perfection. One could perhaps subscribe to Leo Strauss's definition of political theology (as political teachings based upon divine revelation) without stipulating, as he does, a strict division of labour, if not outright segregation, between political theology and political philosophy<sup>243</sup>. It is not the divorce but the right ordering of Athens and Jerusalem/Rome that must be sought. In this connection, the idea and the fact of the sociality of being must be acknowledged. The consideration of being as social being does not amount to a capitulation to the worldviews that inform the positivistic practice of sociology or the cultural Marxist understanding of the social sciences. Maritain and Journet, in many ways, the greatest modern Thomist theologians to

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<sup>243</sup> Leo Strauss. *What is Political Philosophy? And Other Studies*. Glencoe, IL: The Free Press 1959, p.13.

ponder the question of the finite perfection of the political order in relation to the infinite perfection of the human person and of the Church, somewhat neglected to articulate a properly socio-theological discourse. For, were it to be attempted, a social theology would be one in which the highest Being is considered in relation to other beings that are ontologically dependent upon him for their own beings. This ontological dependence covers and also includes the political. The triunity of God already indicates that divine unity, being fundamental, does not, however, encompass the totality of the mystery of God. Of course, this presupposes a hierarchy of tropes within theology itself.

However, for the purposes of bringing men back to a traditional understanding of society, it is the social discourse on the divine that is perhaps the most appropriate. Divine revelation itself contains a social idea of God, in the sense that revelation implies a relation, and the history of the Hebrew people of the Biblical times was the history of God's dealings with them. Revelation, in all its supernatural grandeur, was not separate from the right worship of God. The liturgy makes manifest the social context of revelation, and its social end, namely, the sanctification of the members of the Church as a whole. Thus, the deployment of the social analogy of order would not only reveal the true structure of authority in all the levels of society, or solve the inherently political question of legitimacy: it would also serve to insert ecclesiology in a wider discourse about the unity of human society. As a consequence of that, the duties of obedience also become clearer, and may provide an answer not only to the question of the best political regime, but above all, to that of the virtuous practice of politics. The ethic of obedience does not question nor compromise the free and independent exercise of the active intellect or the inviolability of conscience, rather it demands that both of them work toward greater conformity to the will of God.

But even in the absence of a positive political engagement on the basis of revelation, the social analogy of order could still inform the exercise of political prudence and judgement in the interest of social conservation. It is perhaps more realistic to expect this sort of translation of the ideas of Bonald into the realm of contemporary political practice. It would entail a refusal to consider the ideal regime of human rights as being both descriptive and prescriptive in relation to humanity, unless it be explicitly founded on something other than a vague notion of human freedom that reposes upon no conception of a universally normative human nature, as the need for a renewed *jusnaturalist* illustration and defence of the social nature and dignity of man has perhaps never been greater in the history of Western civilisation than it is currently.





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